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Review of Lynne Pearce, How to Examine a Thesis (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill; OUP, 2005). x + 120 pp. ISBN. 0-335-21442-8. £18.99pbk.

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This book is, of course, aimed at higher degree examiners, but is also suggested reading for "those supervising and studying for, higher degrees." Thus it is that a doctoral student anxious to get a sense of what should be happening on the other side of the fence might be well served by reading Lynne Pearce's work.

The main body of the text provides a step by step guide to the examination process and what an examiner should expect to be doing and when such a one should be doing it. The focus is on UK institutional practice but some comparisons are drawn with the US and Europe. Examples of higher degree criteria from UK institutions are highlighted and discussed with regard to the examiner's point of view. Most useful for the doctoral student, I would venture, is the section on 'Reading the thesis', which provides lists of the tasks that should be undertaken by an examiner when dealing with a thesis. These range from details of referencing to matters of evaluation regarding the arguments, methodology and originality of the material.

In terms of detail, this guide is very strong on processes and organisational structures, time tabling and so forth. It is rich in practical advice regarding the specific bureaucratic and institutional aspects of the role. Also, and it is refreshing, a vein of gritty-realism regarding the psychology of examination is to be found - the anticipation of terrible work loads and accompanying pressure: the sense of 'great honour' that can give way to stress when the work agreed to be done happens to actually arrive at the same time as other commitments. Thus the human factor is well represented and anticipated. For such aspects of the topic

Pearce's humour shines through: one remark regarding diligence versus expedience, "The most honest answer is simply that we do our best in the time available." (Pearce 48) We can all but hope to be examined by such an examiner...