When discussing research ethics, there always seems to be an underpinning suggestion that the legislation governing healthcare research is so bureaucratic it stifles any attempt to undertake timely clinical research and scientific advance. The 2001 Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care (UK); the EU Directive on Good Clinical Practice (2005/28/EC), and the Mental Capacity Act 2005 (UK) have undoubtedly added to this ever increasing regulatory burden. It seems that such regulations while bringing research ethics within statute they can also impose further burdens on researchers. Whether we feel regulation has gone too far or not, it would be hard to disagree with the fact that they provide the means for necessary tighter ethical controls. Perhaps we need to be reminded how research governance procedures are unfortunately the response to past abuses of human rights and incidences of fraud. Attempts have been made to streamline research applications in the NHS with the introduction of the integrated on-line application process (IRAS). There is little doubt of the efficiency of this system in speedily directing research to appropriate Research Ethics Committees (REC), however, for those of us attempting to navigate our way through the maze of digital boxes it can be somewhat daunting and a tedious process. Once an application is submitted there may still be some concerns that the REC imposes unnecessary delays through straying too far into methodological issues and the scientific review of proposals.

1. Under the UK NHS Research Governance Framework, responsibility for the quality of the science lies with the sponsor of the study not RECs. On the other hand, for those of us concerned with research ethics, the situation is not helped by, more often than not, having to deal with applicants who reluctantly fill in forms with no appreciation of the impact their research interventions have on fellow humans, or, furthermore, prepared to justify their project intelligibly to their peers. There seems to be no answer to these dilemmas and what remains is the need for more debate. We would be interested to hear from readers about some of these issues raised in the hope of stimulating a wider platform for discussion and perhaps even incentive for those of us about to tackle the bureaucratic regulation of ethical review.