

Book Review: The Research Impact Handbook by Mark Reed

*Drawing on a range of evidence-based principles that underpin impact delivery, **The Research Impact Handbook** by Mark Reed aims to equip researchers with the skills and confidence needed to embed impact in their own research. **Steven Hill**, Head of Research Policy at HEFCE, finds the text a valuable contribution and welcomes the mixture of theoretical and practical approaches for researchers to understand and address the barriers (and anxiety) around stepping into the impact world.*

The Research Impact Handbook. Mark Reed. Self-published. 2016.

Find this book: [Amazon](#).

Research impact has been a professional obsession of mine for the whole of my career. As a researcher, a Government scientist delivering evidence-based policy, and a policy-maker, creating the conditions that deliver benefits from research has been a recurring theme.

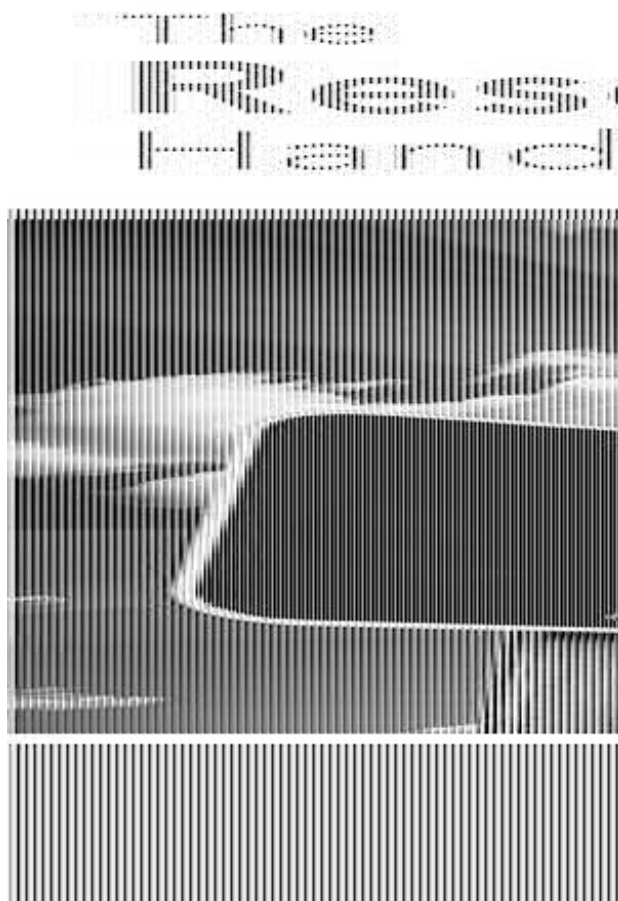
So I opened [The Research Impact Handbook](#), a new book by [Professor Mark Reed](#), with both excitement and trepidation. Excitement because I know that researchers, professional support staff and institutional leaders are often looking for advice and best practice in delivering impact. But trepidation because I also see a worrying trend the delivery of research impact to become a box ticking exercise. Something that is done to satisfy the policy requirement, rather than to make a difference in the world.

I need not have worried. Running through this book is the passion that Reed himself clearly feels about delivering impact from his own research, and also helping others do the same. This is most definitely a book about making a real difference with research.

There are [other handbooks](#) focussed on delivering research impact, and a wealth of academic literature from the theoretical to the practical. This book, however, makes a unique contribution because of the range of material it covers. Starting from a theoretical standpoint, Reed develops evidence-based principles that underpin impact delivery. These are then elaborated in detail, right through to helpful, and extremely practical advice, for putting those principles into practice.

The book opens with a section on the principles underpinning delivery of impact from research, followed by a section discussing a related set of action steps. Two central themes run through these sections: the importance of planning for impact and the central role of stakeholder engagement. The two opening sections are strongly interrelated and interwoven, which means there is some repetition, but this serves to reinforce the central messages. And the opening sections could be read in either order, depending on personal preferences.

In emphasising planning for impact, Reed tackles head-on one of the myths surrounding the 'impact agenda': that



because research is unpredictable, you can't plan for impact. As he points out, most researchers are comfortable with planning their research, which has just as much uncertainty involved as in planning impact. He helpfully sets out the questions that help cut through the uncertainty for impact. Who might be interested in your research? What could change as a result? What can we do to maximise the chances of the change happening? These and other questions provide a straightforward guide to developing a coherent and sensible impact plan.

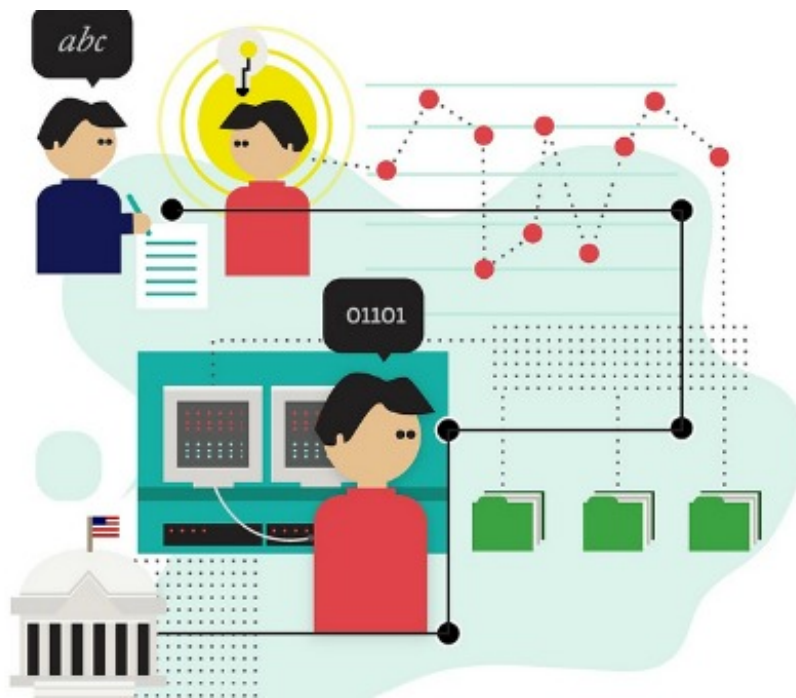


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The second theme developed in the first half of the book is the importance of stakeholder engagement. Reed rightly places this at the centre of impact, and makes a cogent case for developing a detailed knowledge and understanding of the stakeholders interested in or affected by research. Building relationships from the earliest stage is essential, he argues; stakeholder involvement in research and impact planning can itself be important, as well as later in the research process when findings become available.

While the first half of the book contains lots of useful practical suggestions, in the second half Reed delves deeper into the practicalities, with a focus on tools, techniques and templates. The areas covered include stakeholder mapping and engagement, the use of social media, and engagement with policy-makers. While for some readers some of this will be familiar, everyone will find something useful dipping into this section. And while researchers will want to adapt the approaches presented to their own circumstances, they are an excellent starting point that reduce the barriers (and anxiety) around stepping into the impact world.

This book is a real mixture of the theoretical and the practical. Reed is able to pull this off because he has experience not only of delivering impact from research, but has also researched impact delivery itself. The book combines the insight from research, together with real-world examples, and engaging anecdotes that illustrate the highs and lows of being a researcher delivering impact.

I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to get better at delivering impact. It's a good read, full of useful and practical advice. I would also observe that, in a slightly 'meta' twist, the book is a vehicle for transferring research-based insight into practical action. As well as discussing impact, the book is an exemplar of presenting research in an engaging, clear and action-oriented way.

You can hear more on why Professor Reed decided to self-publish his book, in [Episode 3 of the Fast Track Impact Podcast: How to write a book in a week \(and a sneak peak behind the scenes of writing *The Research Impact Handbook*\)](#).

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please review our [Comments Policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.

About the Author

Steven Hill is Head of Research Policy at the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Prior to joining HEFCE Steven was Head of the Strategy Unit at Research Councils UK, covering a range of research policy issues, and had several roles in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, working on evidence-based policy making. Earlier in his career Steven was a university lecturer at the University of Oxford where his research focussed on plant physiology and biotechnology.

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