The quality of social scientific research is increasingly being measured by its capacity for impact: a transformation being driven by RCUK and REF imperatives. This lecture explores the implications of the impact agenda for knowledge production, in particular: (i) the ways in which certain methodological strategies become valorised, with consequences for modes of theory building; (ii) the need to understand better the methods by which research gains traction in policy and practice, a process which may signal the limitations of social scientific inquiry; and (iii) the ethical challenges in promoting data driven innovation in the context of complex and contested political environments.