Mihaela Gruia

Role - Founder and Director

Degree - Politics and International Relations with Employment Experience (First Class), University of Sheffield; MSc Data Science (First Class), University of Sheffield

Mihaela is the founder and director of Research Retold. She has been an Entrepreneur in Residence with Entrepreneurial Spark Powered by NatWest, has worked with the New Entrepreneurs Foundation (where she won the David Pearl prize) and been a G7 Global Policy Analyst. Born in Bucharest, Mihaela has studied, lived and worked in Sheffield, London, Cape Town, San Francisco, and Brussels. She now runs Research Retold from Leeds.

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An innovative approach to complex academic ideas is communicating research effectively and accessibly, delivering increased social impact

Each year approximately £6 billion is invested in research in the UK (UKRI). Research Retold believe the fruits of that investment are under-utilised in decision-making, with academic research often facing a battle to be heard. Why? Because those who need to implement research findings don't always understand the jargon, or how research applies to them and their day-to-day activity.

Research Retold has been solving this problem since its inception in November 2017. Set up by Mihaela Gruia, a social sciences post-graduate of the University of Sheffield, Research Retold makes the complex comprehensible, turning lengthy and dense research reports into short, easily digestible and visual formats.
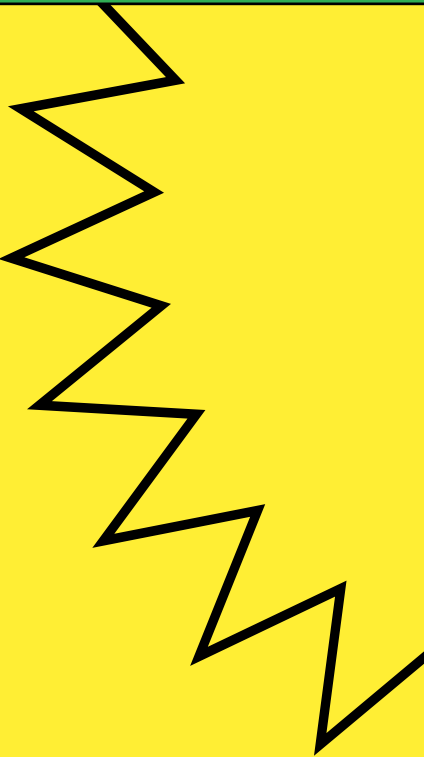
Mihaela's first degree at the University of Sheffield led her to the idea for Research Retold. As part of her studies for a BA in Politics and International Relations with Employment, she spent a placement year working in Brussels for a public affairs communications business. She experienced first-hand how useful graphic design could be in communicating complex ideas; likewise, how important it was to capture, distil and retell the essence of an idea.

The concept of Research Retold was born, and, in 2014, Mihaela returned to Sheffield and attended a StartUp weekend. After 48 hours, she was ready to pitch Research Retold as a business. Mihaela did not win, but one member of the audience was so impressed that he retained her, on a paid-for basis, to help him with his own research pitch to businesses in Hollywood.

" The StartUp Weekend was a great platform for me to test my idea and see if it could be viable in the real world. I am so glad to have received support from the Enterprise Team at the University of Sheffield to make it happen. "

Mihaela Gruia, Research Retold

Mihaela knew then that Research Retold had commercial viability, but to take the idea to the next level she needed help with entrepreneurship and industry knowledge. She therefore moved to London and was a cohort member of the 2015-2016 intake at the New Entrepreneurs Foundation (now the Centre for Entrepreneurs). Consisting of a placement in a startup as well as bi-monthly training sessions to work on business ideas, Mihaela's skills expanded and, in June 2016, she successfully pitched Research Retold at the New Entrepreneurs Foundation Pitch Day, winning the top prize of £3,000. She also won a £10,000 merit scholarship to do an MSc in Data Science at the University of Sheffield, something she took up to acquire the tools to expand the scope and breadth of Research Retold's services into more technology-driven processes.

In November 2017, Mihaela launched Research Retold as a fully-fledged business. Fast forward just three years and Research Retold is a thriving venture that services multiple UK universities, as well as government and research organisations. Research Retold interprets everything from policy briefs and visual summaries into infographics, illustrations, animations and interactive reports. In a world saturated with information, Research Retold makes sure that ideas have a tangible, positive effect in society.

THE IMPACT

Research Retold currently collaborates with 15 UK universities and has worked on over 100 projects.

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Mihaela and her team have also worked with Public Health England, Fairtrade International, Foreign Commonwealth Office, The Stabilisation Unit, HM Government, McMaster University Canada, WYG London.

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Research Retold makes sure that research is disseminated and acted upon, including research by the University of Warwick on the impact of Brexit on local businesses, a scheme by Leeds City Council to tackle social isolation, and a project by the University of Birmingham focusing on social housing and wellbeing.

The start-up journey

Mihaela pays tribute to the various sources of support she has received, including help from the University of Sheffield's Enterprise Hub, London's Centre for Entrepreneurs, and the UK Steel Enterprise Y-Accelerator. The latter culminated in a pitch day on in February 2017: Research Retold won the first prize and £25,000 investment.

> " Research Retold wasn't the result of an 'aha!' moment, but rather me connecting disparate dots into a unique service which solved a genuine problem. Having trained as a social scientist and data scientist, working in Brussels I saw first-hand how researchers needed to be able to present their findings comprehensibly and in a user-friendly fashion. Now, a few years later, Research Retold has grown and continues to help effect tangible societal changes for one simple reason: we make complex ideas easy to understand. "

Mihaela Gruia, Research Retold

Key Learnings :-

✦ Look for support within your community: behind every entrepreneur is a village providing help in both obvious and more intangible ways.

✦ Your university will be able to provide physical space, workshops, networks, mentoring and advice. Get involved with everything it and its partners have to offer.

✦ Attend as many relevant events as you can. Thoroughly research your idea, and don't be afraid to experiment with finding the best way to get it across.

✦ Be flexible and adaptable, and don't be disheartened if setbacks happen – they're part of the journey.
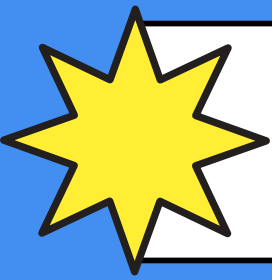
What's next for Research Retold?

Research Retold is already the approved supplier of 15 UK universities, including various members of Aspect and, with plans to double its staff in 2021, the business aims to work with more UK universities as the year progresses. International collaborations are also planned. Research Retold has worked with organisations in Germany and Canada and is looking to expand its global footprint.

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen an upsurge in online learning generally. Research Retold can benefit from this as a business but with a commensurate, positive societal impact, at the same time achieving yet greater alignment with UN SDG 4 – to ensure 'inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'.

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I found it energising to work with Research Retold and their tools and techniques were powerful. Their storyboarding helped us to reach a person-centred approach to communicating information about social prescribing. The comic strip unlocked rich conversation and deeper understanding. We gained great value from it.
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Helen Sims, Business Growth Manager, Voluntary Action Sheffield