

# Top 10



## Ways to Fail at Reform

... or a guide to what to avoid when reforming research assessment

- 1 | PUSH A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL REFORM**  
Ignore differences in disciplines, traditions, cultures, and local norms; expect all fields to move at the same pace: e.g., by copying a natural-science template and apply it to all other fields.
- 2 | UNDERESTIMATE THE PRACTICAL SIDE TO IMPLEMENTATION**  
Demand behavioural change without providing human capacity, infrastructure, support, and protected time for transition. Ignore known implementation pitfalls by not allocating time or means to do the work, and set an unrealistically short timeframe.
- 3 | SKIP STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND DIALOGUE**  
Throw your stakeholder analysis in the bin to be sure to neither listen nor learn, don't consult the people involved or touched by the reform. Also, try not to build buy-in/consensus, especially with researchers and/or those most affected.
- 4 | LEAD IN AN AUTHORITARIAN, HIERARCHICAL WAY**  
Make major decisions alone, instruct instead of engage, micromanage, and act as if your norms are universally best, and be sure to blame others when things stall or fail.
- 5 | FAIL TO ARTICULATE A CLEAR "WHY"**  
Do not find or articulate a clear idea of why you are reforming, which enables you to have unclear expectations on: Who follows up, how they do it, and with what accountability. Create vision documents without clear expectations beforehand on who will- or has to follow up, and how this will be checked.
- 6 | REINVENT THE WHEEL: IMPLEMENT WITHOUT LEARNING LOOPS**  
Start by avoiding to learn from existing practice. Then, do not have any plan or resources for follow-up, learning, revision, or showcasing pilots that prove the change is doable.
- 7 | BE SLOPPY AND/OR OVERCONFIDENT ABOUT EVIDENCE**  
Discard any definition of what "good" looks like, and be imprecise about what you measure and how. Also, claim objective truth with unwarranted and subjective certainty.
- 8 | IGNORE POWER DYNAMICS AND ACADEMIC CULTURE**  
Assume all academic communities will change at the same pace and with the same tools. Avoid accounting for power dynamics, and overlook stewardship and collegial norms.
- 9 | IGNORE WHAT COUNTS AS MEANINGFUL WORK FOR ASSESSORS**  
Do not listen to both the researcher and assessor side of this. Centralise responsibility in unhelpful ways, and introduce incentives that push the opposite of the intended transformation.
- 10 | LET HYPE DRIVE THE REFORM**  
Be sure to bend with trends, while trying to please everyone to avoid any conflicts, and design the reform so nobody is upset.

### NOTE ON METHOD

The guide is based on a reverse brainstorm with 29 respondents, generating 58 inputs on the CeRRA High Level EU Conference on December 4<sup>th</sup> 2025 in Copenhagen. The inputs were reviewed, clustered into recurring themes, and translated into a consolidated list of common and critical pitfalls. The guide is phrased as actions – but these are actions to avoid.

### NOTE ON RESEARCH CONTEXT

Several pitfalls identified by participants relate specifically to research cultures, research assessment practices, disciplinary differences, and academic communities. These include overlooking what counts as meaningful work for assessors, ignoring disciplinary and cultural diversity, misunderstanding academic power dynamics, and assuming that research communities change quickly or uniformly. These themes have been integrated in the guide to ensure relevance for reform processes in research environments.

