The Inaugural Research Assistants and Fellows’ conference took place on Monday 18 May 2015. The conference provided an excellent opportunity for all RAs and RFs across each of the seven schools to discuss their experiences of being a researcher at the University of Huddersfield. It also provided an opportunity to identify any areas where further support and/or training from the University is required to help these researchers progress in their research and academic careers.

The event was opened by Leanne Monchuk (Research Assistant, School of Human and Health Sciences) who was responsible for organising the conference and Professor Bob Cryan (Vice Chancellor of the University of Huddersfield). The event was supported by Staff Development and Research and Enterprise.

Emma Sandon-Hesketh (Head of Research Development from the University of Central Lancashire and Vitae’s North West Regional Representative) provided detailed input on the Research Development Framework (RDF). The researchers then reviewed the RDF and identified any areas of training/support they would like to access to help develop their research skills and ultimately their career as researchers.

The conference closed with a question and answer session by three members of our Professoriate (Professor Liz Towns-Andrews, Professor Joe Sweeney and Professor Rachel Armitage) and Siobhan Campbell from Human Resources.

The conference was very successful and the organisers received positive feedback from delegates.
Feedback from the conference has been reviewed and as a result a dedicated RA/RF network is in the process of being established. It is envisaged that this will provide RAs and RFs the opportunity to share their experiences with colleagues and to provide a forum where any ideas, suggestions or concerns can then be relayed, when appropriate, to the University’s Concordat Steering Group and the University Research Council. Thus, the network aims to provide RAs and RFs with a voice at a strategic level.

In addition:

1. Funding has now been specifically allocated from 2015/2016 to help deliver tailored training and CPD for RAs and RFs.
2. A number of key issues were raised which were of a strategic nature. These issues have/will be fed back to the relevant committee (e.g. University Concordat Steering Group or University Research Council).
3. Gaps in training have been identified and Staff Development and Research and Enterprise are working on developing a dedicated training programme. This training will be mapped onto each of the four domains of the RDF. It is envisaged that this training will be delivered by internal and external speakers and that all training will be bespoke to RAs and RFs. This programme is in the process of being developed, but will include sessions such as: a career progression workshop; understanding research funding; assertiveness and confidence building; and writing for publication.
4. Dedicated RA/RF networking events will be held quarterly. These will be an excellent opportunity to network and to ensure that training and development needs are continually assessed.