

Ashton Fire Research Fund

This proposal outlines the Ashton Fire Research Fund to support external research in fire engineering. The scheme involves allocating funding each year to support practical, application-focused research projects that address current challenges in fire engineering within the UK built environment. The purpose of the scheme is to improve collective understanding and application within the fire engineering community for designing safer buildings during fires and support technical excellence within Ashton Fire. The document details key information for potential applicants to propose research project submissions to receive funding.

1.1 Purpose

Ashton Fire is committed to supporting the future of fire engineering through research. As industry practitioners with strong academic connections, we know that research is key to addressing emerging challenges in fire engineering to support safer building design.

The Ashton Fire Research Fund extends our commitment beyond our internal work, research, and existing academic partnerships. By supporting external research initiatives, our aim is to stimulate new approaches to fire engineering problems and foster collaboration across the industry.

We value practical, application-focused research that bridges the gap between theoretical understanding and real-world application. Through this fund, we seek to build new relationships and cultivate existing relationships with research organisations / individuals who share our desire to advance fire engineering knowledge and practice.

1.2 Financial contribution

Ashton Fire will provide up to £24,000 total funding per year across all projects in support of fire engineering research. Project funding for any one application is to be for no more than £12,000 (exc. VAT) and no less than £6,000 (exc. VAT). This funding range has been established to ensure appropriate resource allocation for meaningful research outcomes whilst maintaining flexibility to support projects of varying scope and complexity.

Applicants may request the full amount for larger projects or apply for partial funding as appropriate for their research needs. This approach allows us the potential to support multiple valuable research initiatives throughout the year.

Projects seeking supplemental funding must clearly demonstrate how Ashton Fire's contribution will be used alongside other funding sources. Please identify all additional funders and disclose any restrictions that might affect the research publication or dissemination of results as well as any potential conflicts between different funders' requirements or between other funding arrangements and the terms of this grant.

Project funding will be issued in two instalments: 50% upon successful application and execution of the grant agreement, and the remaining 50% upon project completion (submission and acceptance by Ashton Fire). Recipients will be required to agree to contractual terms and conditions prior to the release of funds.

Examples of items/activities which the research funding can be used for includes salaries / time expenditure, equipment and supplies (e.g., laboratory equipment necessary for the research, computers, software, and technology tools, research materials and consumables, and specialised instruments and apparatus).

Examples of items / activities which the research funding cannot be used for includes:

- Non-research project activities (e.g., general administrative costs unrelated to the project, personal expenses of researchers, entertainment or social events, routine office supplies for non-research work, etc.).

- Prohibited expenses (e.g., alcohol [except in specific research contexts], personal vehicles or car payments, furniture for personal offices, general building maintenance, etc.).
- Timing restrictions (e.g. expenses incurred before the grant start date, costs that extend beyond the grant period without approval, pre-award costs (unless specifically authorised, etc.).
- Expenses that duplicate existing institutional resources or which are funded by alternate means.

1.3 Data protection

All research activities funded under this research fund must comply with UK GDPR and applicable data protection legislation which is led by the recipients. Recipients acknowledge that any processing of personal data must be conducted with appropriate legal basis and suitable safeguards in place. Research involving personal data must establish a clear lawful basis for processing, with additional conditions required for special category data. Recipients must document the legal basis for all data processing activities and ensure this is communicated to data subjects through appropriate privacy notices.

Recipients must implement procedures to facilitate data subject rights, including rights of access, rectification, erasure, and objection. Research protocols should account for how these rights will be respected whilst maintaining research integrity, including establishing clear procedures for responding to data subject requests within required timeframes. Data processing must adhere to principles of data minimisation and purpose limitation, ensuring only necessary data is collected and processed. Data must not be processed for purposes beyond the approved research project without obtaining additional consent or establishing new legal grounds.

Appropriate technical and organisational measures must be implemented to ensure data security. Personal data should be retained only as long as necessary for research purposes, with clear retention schedules and secure disposal procedures for both physical and electronic data. Any sharing of personal data with third parties must be governed by appropriate data sharing agreements ensuring continued compliance. Failure to comply with data protection requirements may result in grant termination, recovery of funds, or exclusion from future funding opportunities. Recipients remain responsible for any regulatory penalties arising from non-compliance.

1.4 Institutional ethics committee

The research team will take full responsibility for obtaining all necessary ethics approvals for their institution prior to commencing any data collection activities. The project timeline is to include contingency periods to accommodate ethics review processes without impacting overall deliverables.

1.5 Areas of research

Ashton Fire supports research that delivers practical, tangible, real-world outcomes in fire engineering and building design across the UK. We are particularly interested in approaches that address current challenges, such as:

- Development of guidance for fire engineers and others involved in the building design process support the specification and use of evacuation lifts for mobility-impaired occupants.
- Assessment and development of guidance for fire engineers and others involved in the building design process support regarding the scalability of means of egress provision considering an ageing population and increases in mobility-impaired occupants.
- Experiments and development of guidance for fire engineers and others involved in the building design process support to address the challenges associated with electric vehicles, e.g., safe storage of e-bikes, electric vehicle charging in car parks, structural response to battery fires, etc.
- The application of artificial intelligence to support automation in the fire engineering process, e.g., verifying adherence with fire design guidance, fire strategy report production, etc.

While these examples represent select current areas of interest, we welcome proposals on any fire safety topics that promise practical applications and outcomes. We recognise the value of fresh perspectives and are open to funding research that addresses emerging fire safety challenges not listed above.

1.6 Application process and proposal

A standard template / format is not required for submission of a proposal, but a document should be prepared which is no less than 5 but no more than 10 A4 pages. The proposal should be submitted in PDF format and is expected to include:

- Project title.
- Problem statement (description of the problem / challenge the research is intended to address).
- Affiliations and contact details.
- Aims and objectives.
- Research methodology.
- Requested budget, how this has been estimated and what it is to be spent on in an itemised manner.
- Deliverables / activities.
- Schedule (highlighting key dates including project start, kick-off meeting, deliverable submissions, deliverable feedback / comments workshop(s), and end dates).
- Plans for internal / external dissemination.
- Declaration of any other funds supporting or applied for the project (where applicable).
- Any constraints that may affect publication (where applicable).
- CVs of those who will be responsible for the research (note: CVs will not count towards page count).

Ashton Fire has developed in-house technical specialists / experts through technical skills groups (TSGs) who support Ashton Fire in the following fire engineering subject matter domains:

- Fire & smoke dynamics.
- Human behaviour & evacuation dynamics.
- Structural fire engineering.
- Fire protection systems.
- Fire strategies and risk.

To support the direction and maintain real-world contextualisation for the project, the proposal should look to include collaboration with at least one of Ashton Fire's TSGs or, alternatively, specific individuals within Ashton Fire (which would be funded internally by Ashton Fire).

All projects would be expected to include at least a kick-off meeting (at the beginning of the project) and a close-out meeting (at the end of the project) which includes representatives from Ashton Fire. Depending on the length of the project, quarterly meetings would also be encouraged.

The Ashton Fire research fund is an annual initiative and therefore it is encouraged that projects can be completed within a year. However, under certain circumstances, we will consider applications where the timeline is extended beyond this (up to a maximum of 24 months).

Applications should be submitted by email to researchfund@ashtonfire.com.

1.7 Deliverables

The project must conclude with a final report. While there is flexibility in how the report is structured and presented, it is expected to cover these key points as a minimum:

- Research objectives.
- Background to the problem and current implications for fire engineers in the building design process.
- Methodology for the study / analysis.
- Results / findings.
- Summary of how the research objectives were achieved.
- Specific guidance for fire engineers based on findings / insights from the research.

The report will be published in full on Ashton Fire's website with acknowledgement of all relevant authors and institutions.

We also encourage applicants to present and publish their outcomes in journals, conference proceedings, or industry magazines. Consideration of this within the application proposal will be looked upon favourably.

1.8 Intellectual property and publication rights

Intellectual property generated through this research fund will typically be owned by Ashton Fire. We are committed to maximising the public benefit and accessibility of research outputs whilst recognising the diverse nature of projects and their specific circumstances. Generally, we expect research outputs including publications, datasets, methodologies, and tools to be made publicly available through appropriate channels within a reasonable timeframe following project completion subject to agreement with Ashton Fire. However, we understand that different types of research may require tailored approaches to dissemination, and we will work with funded organisations on a case-by-case basis to determine the most appropriate sharing mechanisms. Where commercial potential exists, organisations are to discuss intellectual property arrangements with Ashton Fire about how to balance commercialisation opportunities with public access requirements. We recognise that some research outputs may contain sensitive information or require specific ethical considerations, and dissemination plans will be developed collaboratively to ensure appropriate protection whilst still advancing the field. Applicants should outline their anticipated approach to intellectual property management and dissemination in their proposals.

1.9 Eligibility

The application is open to any qualified applicant with relevant experience, including individuals, universities, research institutes, companies, consultancies, and non-profit organisations, inside the UK.

Consortiums of multiple organisations are eligible to apply, provided the proposal clearly outlines how funds will be distributed among consortium members and identifies a lead organisation.

There are no restrictions limiting applicants to a single project proposal.

1.10 Deadlines

Ashton Fire will review research fund applications annually.

Applications must be received by the 2nd of February to be considered for that year's funding cycle. Submissions received after this deadline may be considered for the following year's funding cycle, provided this intention is clearly stated in the application.

Applicants will be notified by mid-March if they have been successful. Applicants should factor this timeline into their project planning when preparing proposals.

1.11 Queries

Any questions regarding the application process, eligibility requirements, or proposal preparation should be directed to researchfund@ashtonfire.com. We welcome inquiries and are happy to provide clarification to help in developing your application.