Future Trends Survey:

January 2017

RIBA
Architecture.com

The RIBA's monthly Future Trends Survey

was launched in January 2009 to monitor business and employment trends affecting the architects' profession. Participants give monthly predictions for overall workload and staffing levels over the next three months, and are also asked about their workload predictions in key sectors: private housing, commercial, community and public sector. In addition practices are asked on a quarterly basis about their current workload and staffing levels. The Survey is carried out by the RIBA in partnership with the Fees Bureau. Results of the Survey, including a full graphical analysis, are published each month on www.architecture.com

The following is a summary analysis of the results from the January 2017 Survey returns.

Future workload (January 2017)

How do you expect the architectural workload in the organisation you work in or own to change over the next three months.

Overall

Expect	%
Decrease	11
Stay the same	54
Increase	35
TOTAL	100
Balance	+24

(The definition for the balance figure is the difference between those expecting more work and those expecting less.).

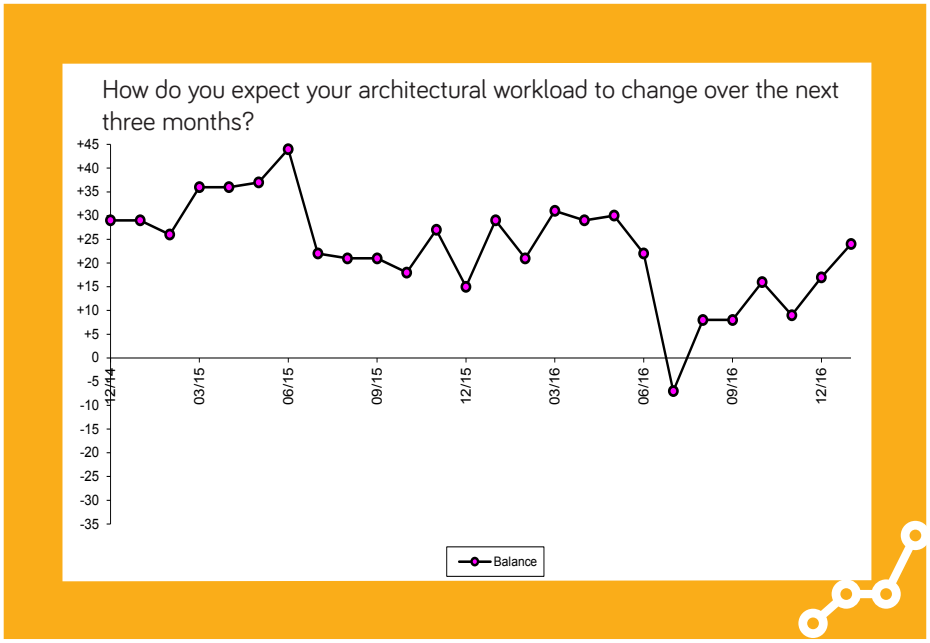
The RIBA Future Trends Workload Index saw a further significant increase this month, rising to +24 in January 2017, up from +17 in December 2016. Overall confidence levels about future workloads have now recovered to pre-Referendum levels.

In terms of geographical analysis, London practices (balance figure +15) did not report any change and remain relatively cautious about future prospects. However, practices located in the North of England (balance figure +48) saw a big jump in confidence. Wales and the West (balance figure +28) and the South of England (balance figure +27) were also optimistic about medium-term workloads.

Analysing the January data in terms of practice size, large practices (51+ staff), with a balance figure of +38, and medium-sized practices (11 - 50 staff), with a balance figure of +50, remain more upbeat than small practices (1 – 10 staff), with a balance figure of +19, but all practice size categories stayed positive about future work prospects.

The following graph plots the RIBA Future Workload index over time:

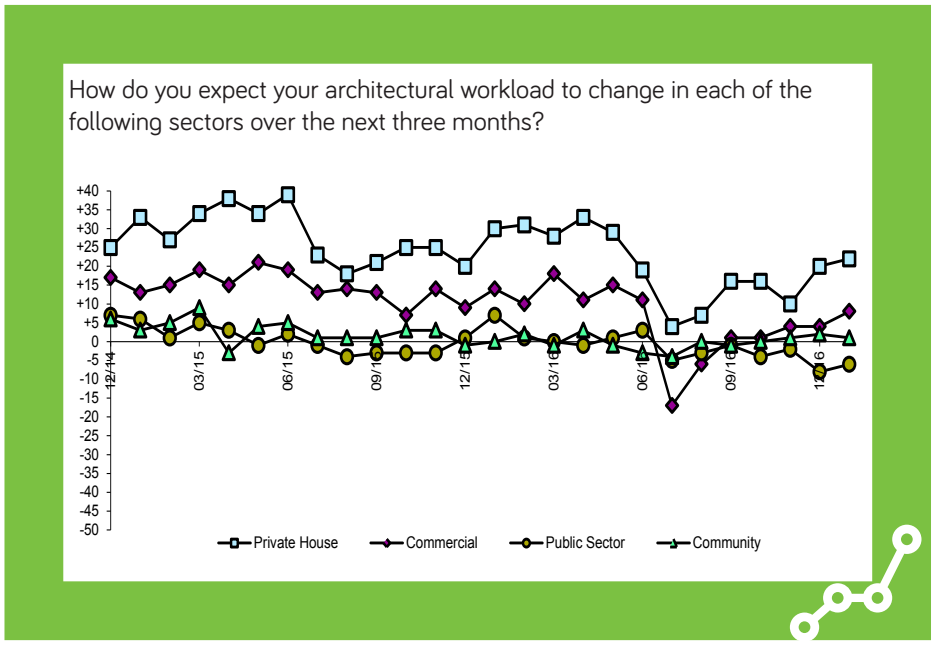
Notes
The balance figure is plotted here. The definition for the balance figure is the difference between those expecting more work and those expecting less.



In terms of different work sectors, the commercial sector workload forecast returned to an upward trajectory, rising to +8 in January 2017, up from +4 in December 2016. The private housing sector was also on the up, standing at +22 in January 2017 compared with +20 in December 2016.

The public sector workload forecast recovered a little this month, rising to -6 in January from -8 in December but remains trapped in negative territory, with little sign of real confidence in any significant uplift in public sector workloads. The community sector forecast fell marginally this month, down from +2 to +1.

The following graph tracks the sector predictions in the RIBA Future Trends Survey over time:



Future staffing levels (January 2017)

How do you think the number of permanent architectural staff employed in your organisation will change over the next three months?

Permanent Staff	%
Decrease	6
Stay the same	80
Increase	14
TOTAL	100
Balance	+8

(The definition for the balance figure is the difference between those expecting to employ more permanent staff in the next three months and those expecting to employ fewer.)

The RIBA Future Trends Staffing Index recovered strongly this month, rising to +8 in January 2017 from +1 in December 2016.

94% of our practices expect their permanent staffing levels to stay the same or increase over the next three months, suggesting that the employment market for salaried architects should remain healthy into the spring.

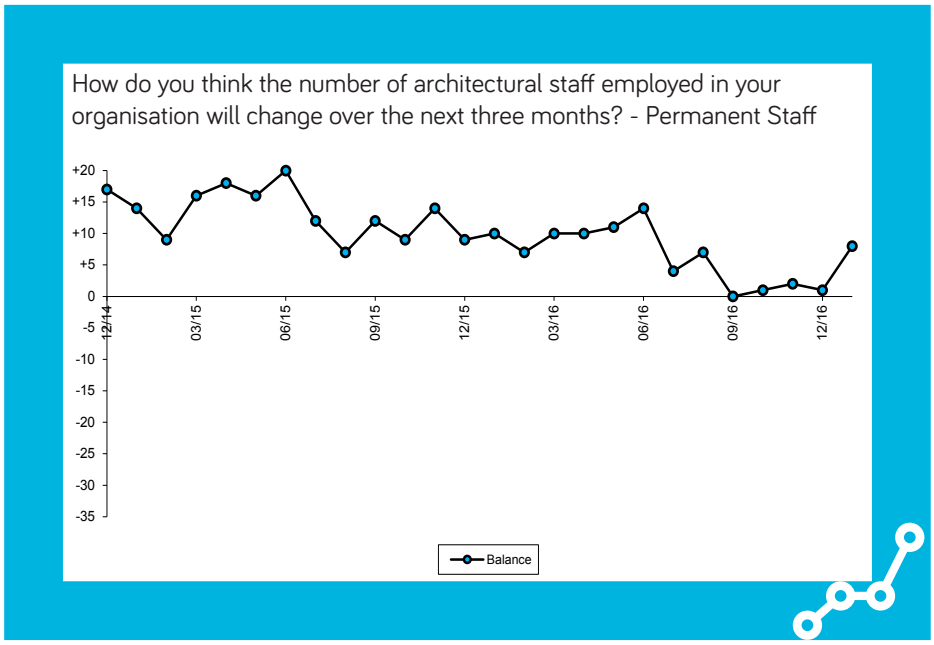
This month it was again medium-sized practices (11 - 50 staff), with a balance figure of +27, that were the most positive about future staffing levels, but large practices (51+ staff) appeared to throw off some of the caution they had shown before Christmas, returning a balance figure of +25. Small practices (1 - 10 staff), with a balance figure of +4, remain the least confident about their ability to increase staffing levels in the medium term.

Commentary received from our participating practices continues to be predominantly positive, particularly amongst practices focussed on the private housing sector.

The picture also remains fairly positive if a little more cautious in the commercial sector. Opinions seem to vary very widely as to whether the Brexit decision in the EU Referendum will have a significant economic impact that will affect the work of architects in the medium and long term; a case of the jury still being out of the room.

The following graph plots the RIBA Future Trends Staffing Index over time:

Notes
The balance figure is plotted here. The definition for the balance figure is the difference between those expecting to employ more permanent staff in the next three months and those expecting to employ fewer



The RIBA Future Trends Survey is based on a representative sample of the range of different practice sizes and geographical locations which enables analysis of the trends in sectors, size groups and by nation and region.

A total of 200 practices took part in the Survey in January 2017. The development of a larger database of respondents will increase the statistical accuracy of the survey, and if your practice would like to participate in future months, please contact the RIBA Practice Department on 020 7307 3749 or email practice@riba.org. The survey takes approximately five minutes to complete each month, and all returns are independently processed in strict confidence by our partners the Fees Bureau.