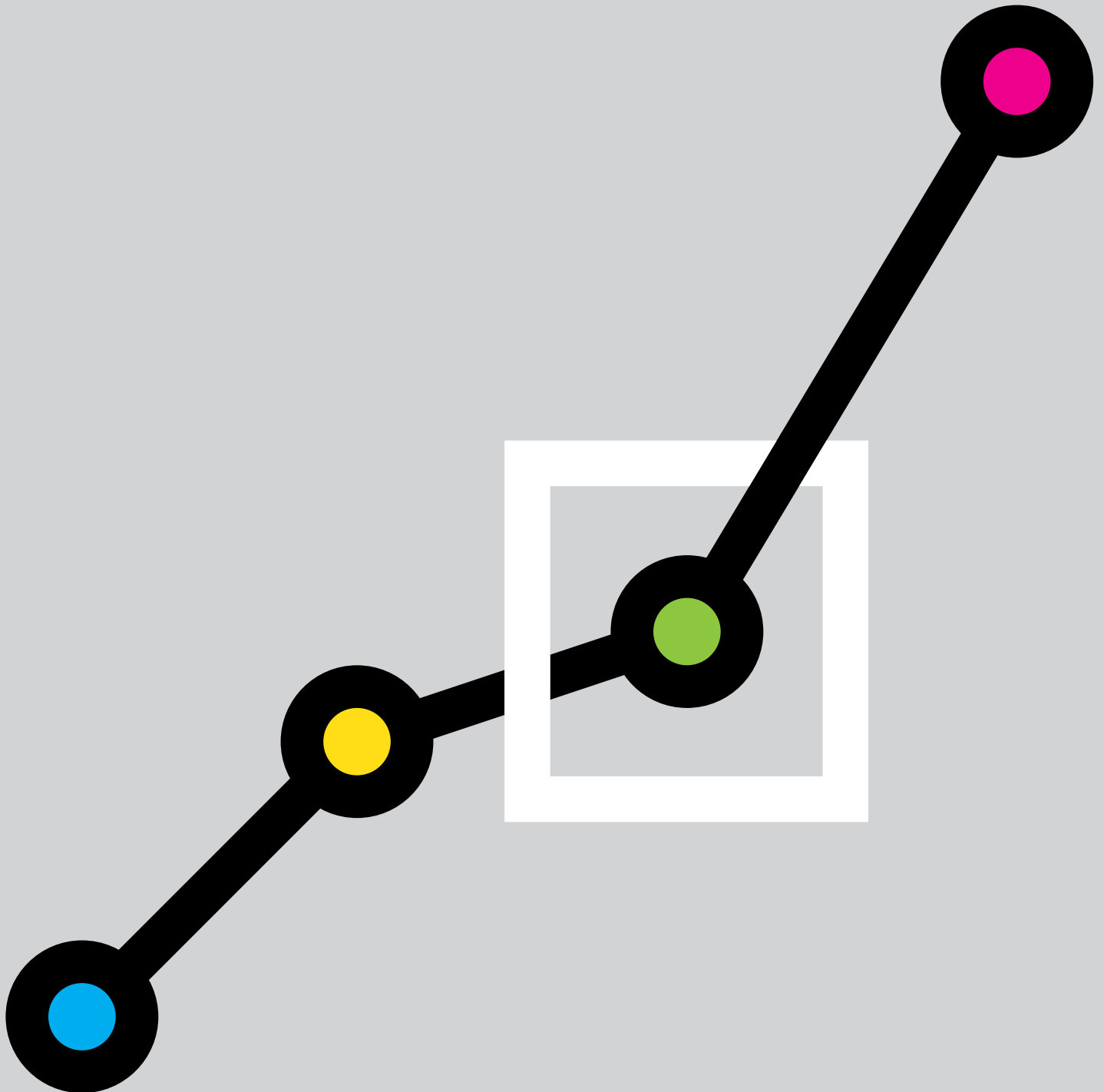


# Future Trends Survey:

December 2021



## 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](http://www.architecture.com)

The following is a summary analysis of the results from the December 2021 survey returns.

### RIBA Future Trends Workload Index (December 2021)

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	12
Stay the same	59
Increase	29
TOTAL	100*
<b>Balance</b>	<b>+18</b>

\*'Increase' minus 'Decrease' does not equal the 'Balance' figure due to rounding.

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

#### 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.

2021 has ended with an uptick in confidence. In December, the RIBA Future Trends Workload Index returned a positive balance of +18, a 5 point increase on November's figure of +13.

Twenty-nine per cent of practices expect workloads to grow in the coming three months, whilst fifty-nine per cent expect them to remain the same. Twelve per cent of practices expect workloads to decrease.

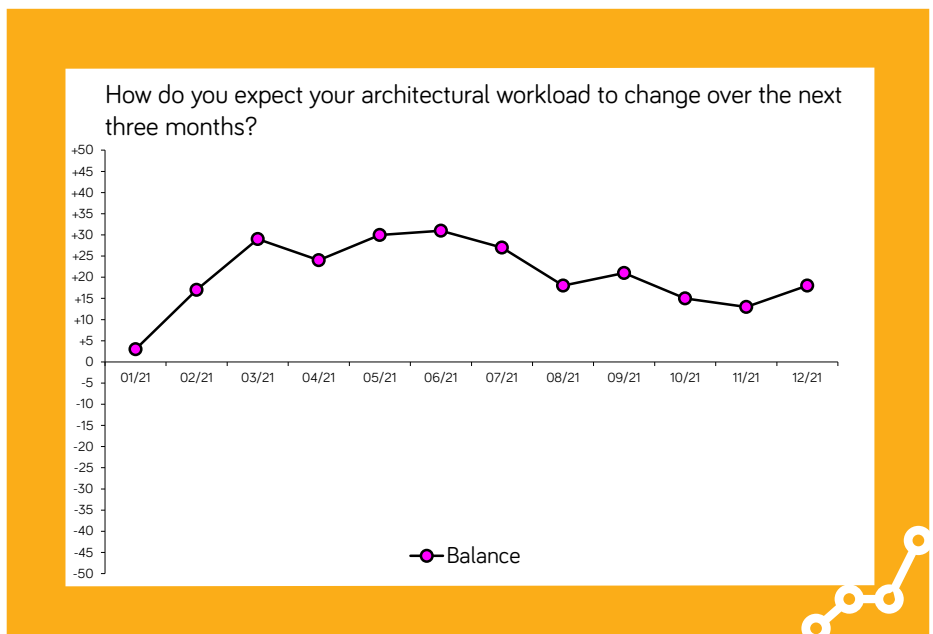
Throughout 2021, the RIBA the Future Trends Workload Index has remained in positive territory, hitting a high of +31 in June, and a low of +3 in January. For the year, the average index figure was +21. This compares to -7 in 2020.

December saw actual workloads reported to be 6% greater than 12 months ago.

On balance, all practice sizes remain confident about future workloads, as do all regions.

The Housing, Commercial, and Public Sectors are expected to grow over the coming three months. The outlook for the Community sector remains pessimistic, however.

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



Looking at the December 2021 RIBA Future Trends Workload Index in terms of practice size, region and sector:

In December, **Small practices** (1 - 10 staff) practices posted a positive balance figure of +15, up 6 points from November's figure of +9.

**Large and medium-sized practices** (11 - 50 and 51+ staff) continue to show consistently high levels of optimism. The December balance figure for mid to large-sized practices is +38, up from +32 last month.

The year ends with all regions being positive about workloads for the first quarter of 2022.

London remains optimistic about future workloads, but that optimism has softened as the year ends. With a balance figure of +7, December sees a 19 point drop in confidence when compared to November.

The North of England remains firmly positive with a balance of +28, up from +24 last month. During 2021, the North of England was the most optimistic region, on average.

Wales & the West has posted the highest balance score this month, ending a year of optimism for the region with a balance figure of +26.

After a dip in confidence last month, the South of England returns to optimism with a Future Workload Index of +13.

The Midlands & East Anglia (+15) also ends the year on a positive note.

Turning to work sectors, three of the four sectors have seen optimism weaken, and one, the community sector, has fallen into negative territory.

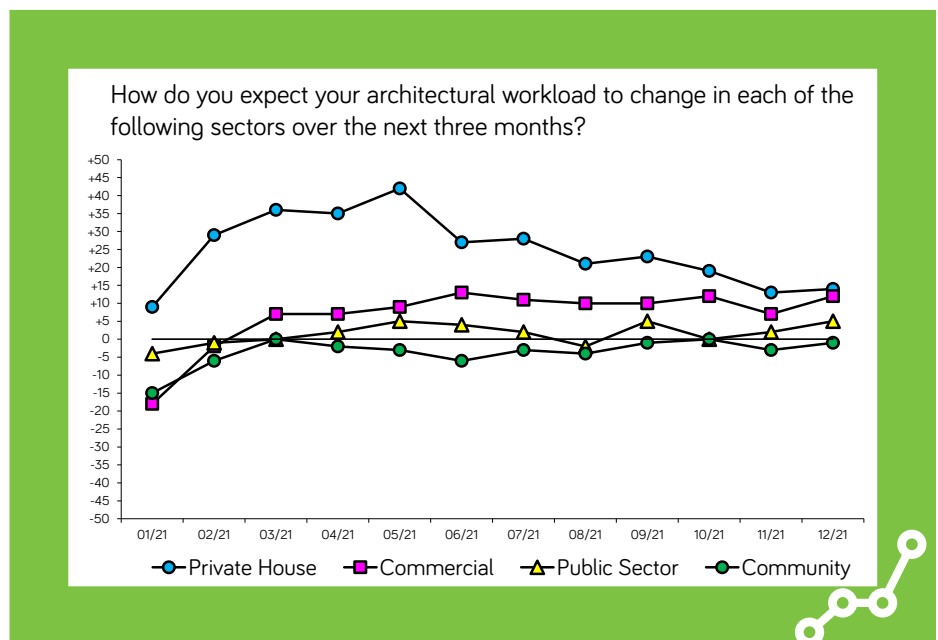
In December, the **private housing sector** posted a balance figure of +14, up one point from last month. Consistently the strongest sector this year, it averaged a balance figure of +25 in 2021, and a high of +42 (in May).

The **commercial sector** recovered from last month's fall, with a December balance figure of +12, up 5 points.

Rising 3 points from November's balance of +2, the **public sector** rose again in December, to match the sector's modest 2021 high of +5.

The **community sector** remained negative, with a -1 balance score, up two points from last month's -3.

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



**RIBA Future Trends Staffing Index**  
(December 2021)

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

Permanent Staff	%
Decrease	5
Stay the same	83
Increase	13
TOTAL	100
<b>Balance</b>	<b>8</b>

(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 December, the RIBA Future Trends Permanent Staffing Index rose from zero in November to +8 this month. This increased balance score is due solely to fewer practices expecting to see a decrease in the number of permanent they employ.

As in November, thirteen per cent of practices expect to employ more permanent staff over the coming three months. Five per cent expect to employ fewer. Eighty-three per cent expect staffing levels to stay the same.

With a combined balance figure of +43 for medium and large-size practices (11+ staff), the prospects for staff recruitment in early 2022 remains strong. Forty-six per cent of larger practices expect staff levels to increase in the next three months, while just 4% expect a decrease.

Though also positive, small practices (1 - 10 staff) remain more cautious in their plans for recruitment, with a balance figure of +3. Nevertheless, this marks a recovery from November's figure of -3.

In December, the regional picture for permanent staffing picture has strengthened with no region being pessimistic about future permanent staffing levels.

London and the North of England both returned an index figure of +11, the South posted a figure of +10 and Wales & The West + 9. The Midlands & East Anglia has returned a zero balance figure this month.

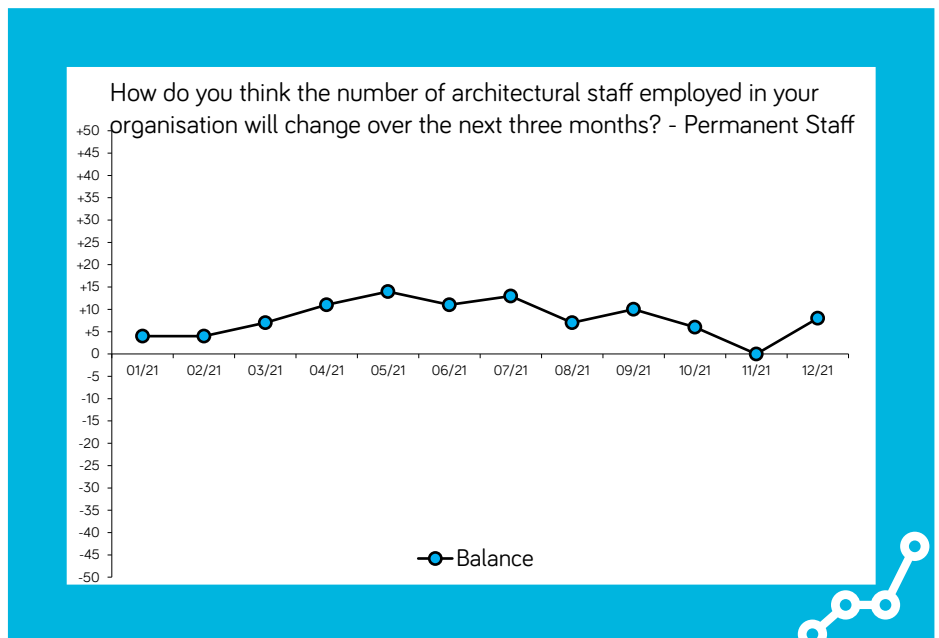
The Temporary Staffing Index fell back somewhat in December, closing the year at +3.

In December personal underemployment fell again slightly (by one percentage point) to 13%.

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



## RIBA Future Trends (December 2021)

2021 ends with a small uptick in confidence as, on balance, practices continue to be optimistic about coming workloads.

After the unprecedented difficulties of 2020, 2021 saw a recovery in confidence and workloads led by the housing sector, followed by the commercial sector.

London, the UK's largest architecture market by far, saw the biggest drop in confidence at the start of the pandemic and took the longest to regain confidence. However, by the end of 2021 London had seen ten successive months of confidence in future work. All regions are now optimistic with the North of England and Wales & The West consistently outperforming other regions throughout the year.

Risks for 2022 remain, however, with ongoing challenges around the availability and cost of construction products, a shortage of skilled tradespeople, planning delays, rising PII costs, a looming cost of living crisis that may dampen domestic demand, and risks to the macro-economy from weak growth and rising inflation.

The effects of the Omicron variant are yet to be fully realised, however, early indications suggest that despite very high infection rates, the hit to the economy will be significantly less than that of previous waves.

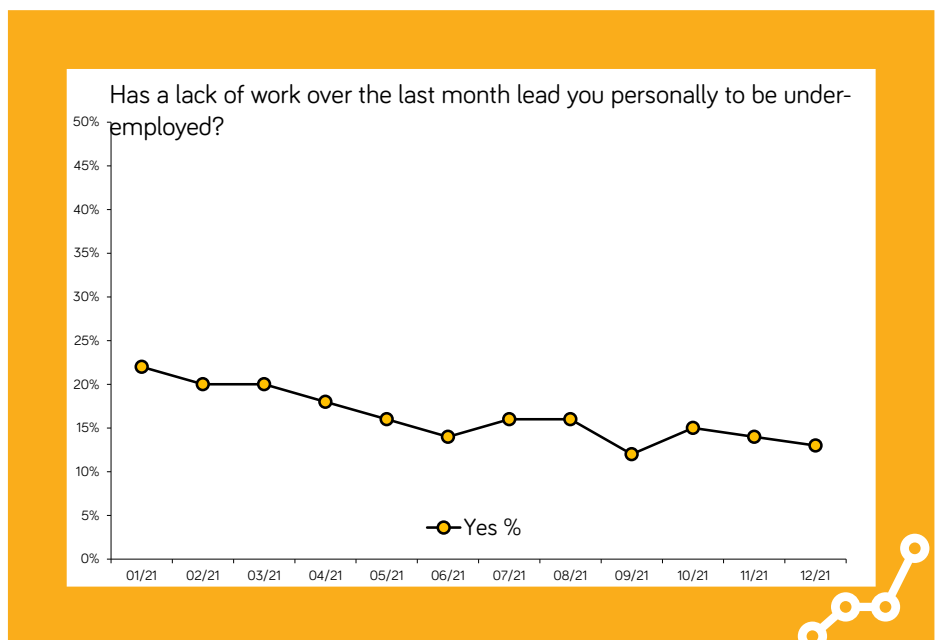
The commentary received gives a mixed picture. On one hand, practices describe how material cost inflation, twinned with shortages of both materials and people, is causing project delays and making tendering increasingly difficult. On the other, practices report full pipelines of work and healthy levels of new enquires. For some, 2021 has been among their busiest years, with enquiries having to be turned away.

There are looming challenges, but overall architects are optimistic about the months ahead.

### Notes

The percentages experiencing project delays due to product sourcing issues is plotted here.

The following graph plots the levels of personal underemployment over time:



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 225 practices took part in the Survey in December 2021. 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](mailto: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.