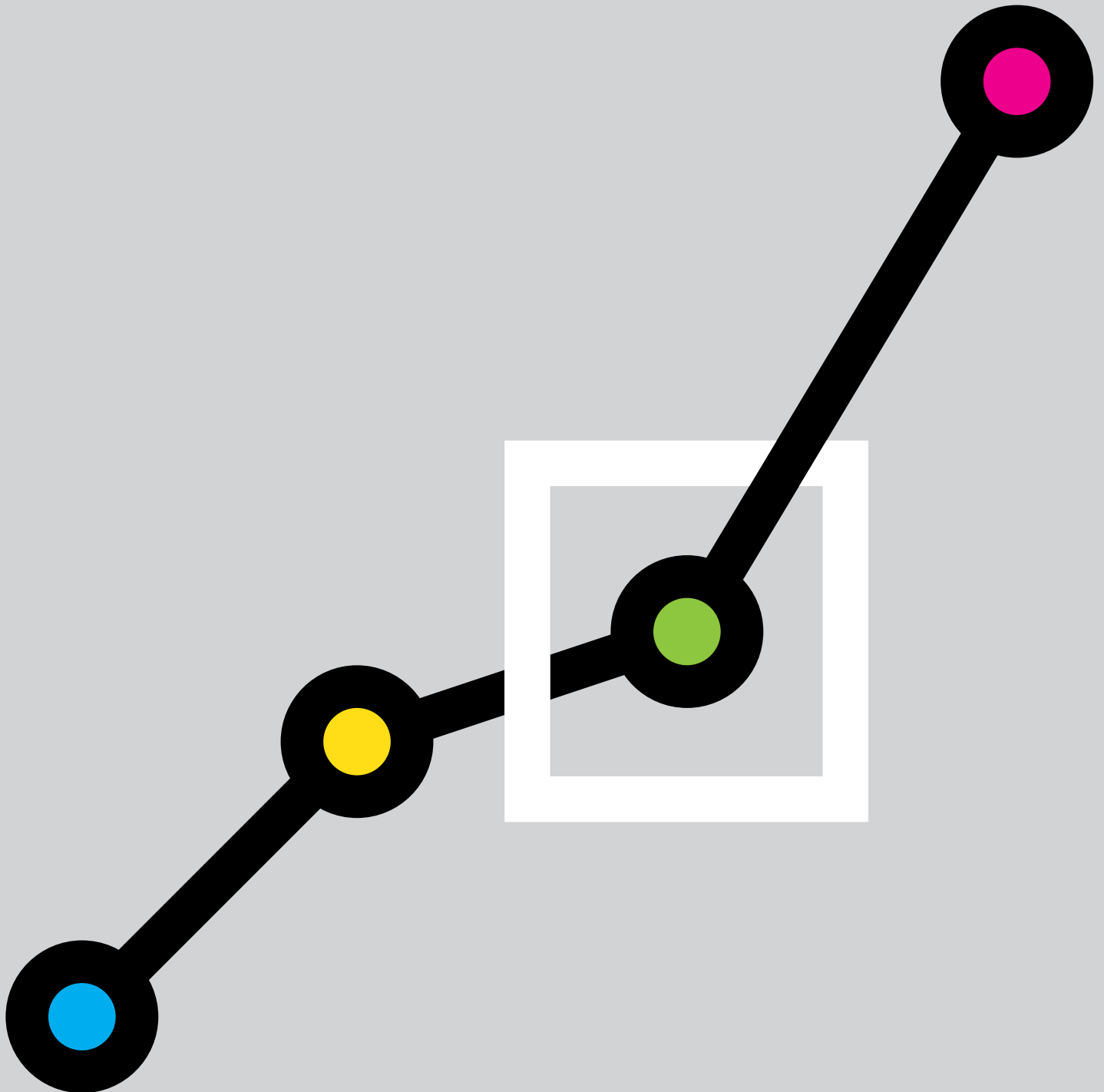


Future Trends Survey:

August 2024



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 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

RIBA Future Trends August 2024:

Overview

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	21
Stay the same	55
Increase	23
TOTAL	100
Balance	+2*

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

** Values do not total 100 due to rounding.*

August sees only slight changes in the profession's view about future workloads. Overall, architects remain cautiously optimistic. Staffing intentions suggest an anticipation of longer-term growth.

In August, the RIBA Future Trends Workload Index stood at +2, a one-point increase compared with July. A positive balance indicates an overall expectation among architects that workloads will increase in the coming three months.

Twenty-three per cent of architects' practices anticipate an increase in workloads over the next three months, while 21% expect a decline. Fifty-five per cent expect workloads to remain stable.

The regional picture remains mixed. While most areas are optimistic about future work, the capital remains pessimistic.

Smaller practices remain pessimistic about future workload, while larger practices are optimistic.

The outlook across the four monitored work sectors has remained broadly static, with only minor changes in sectoral outlook.

Current workloads are lower than they were a year ago. The average practice workload has decreased by 11% compared to twelve months ago.

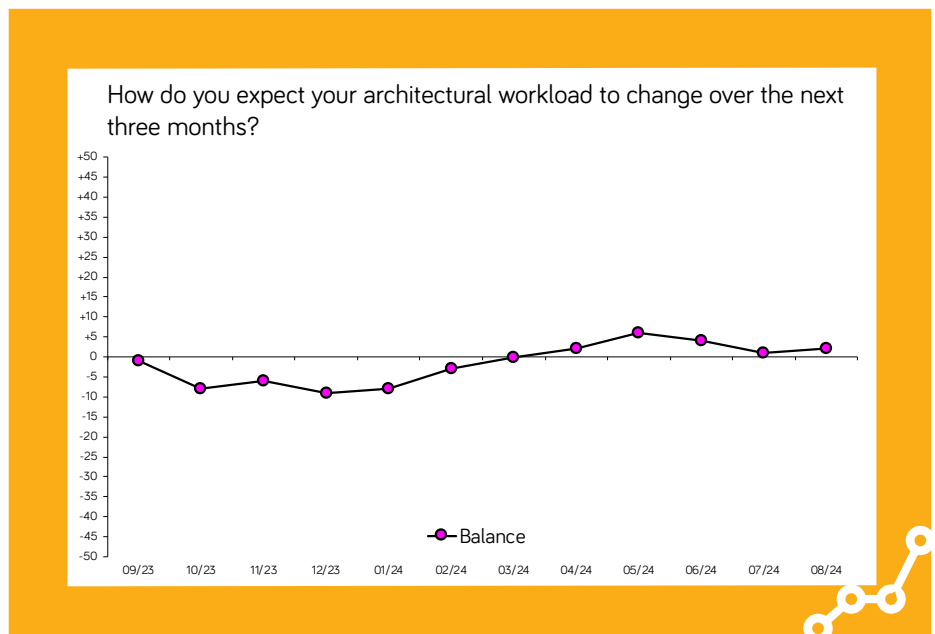
In August, 26% of architects reported personal underemployment, the same as last month.

At +5, the RIBA Permanent Staffing Index is positive and has strengthened.

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.



**RIBA Future Trends August 2024:
Workload Index: Analysis by Practice Size,
Region, and Sector**

In August, the outlook for **small practices** (1 - 10 staff) improved but remains negative, with a Workload Index figure of -2, compared with -6 in July. Twenty-one per cent of small practices anticipate an increase in workloads, 23% expect a decrease, and 56% anticipate stability.

In contrast, the outlook for **large (51+ staff) and medium-sized practices** (11 -50 staff) remains optimistic, with a Workload Index of +33. Forty-one per cent expect workload growth, 7% anticipate a contraction, and 52% expect steady workloads.

This difference between small, and large & medium practices is a long-term trend; during the past 24 months, smaller practices have had an average RIBA Workload Index of -8, while for larger practices the figure is +19.

The regional outlook remains mixed this month.

The outlook for Wales and the West has deteriorated this month, with a workload Index of -9, down from 0 in July.

The outlook among practices based in the capital has recovered somewhat, improving from -10 in July to -4 in August.

The South of England has strongly recovered from its negative outlook in July, with a Workload Index of +8. The outlook for the North of England continues to improve, with a Workload Index of +12. Although still positive, the Midlands & East Anglia sees a six-point dip in confidence, now at +6.

The sectoral outlook remains similar to last month.

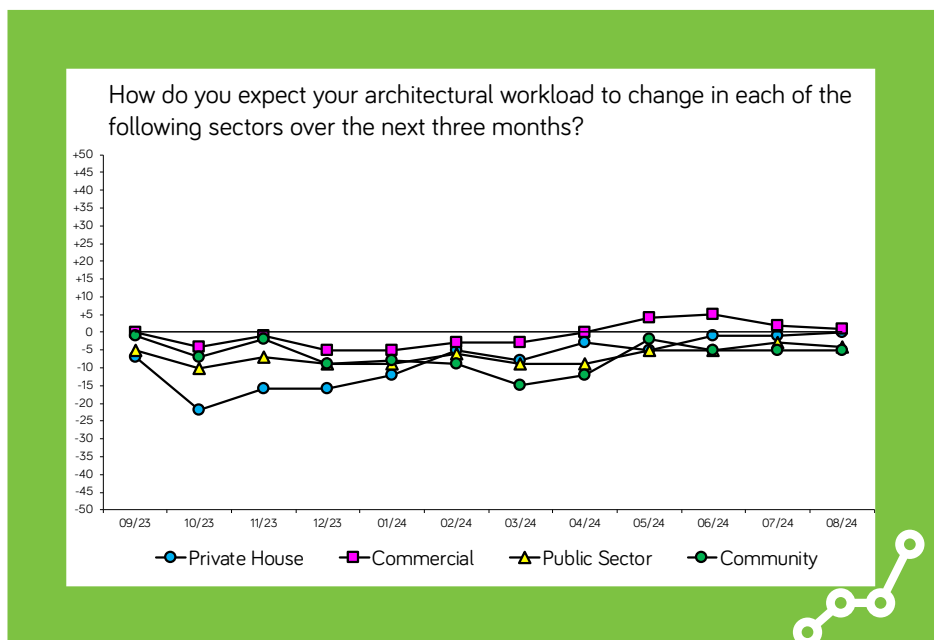
The **commercial sector** remains positive at +1. Although slightly down from +2 in July, this marks the fourth consecutive positive month for the sector - a period of sustained optimism not seen since early 2022.

After more than a year of pessimism, the outlook for **private housing** has become neutral, with a zero Workload Index in August. Not positive, but notable; this is the first time since early 2023 that the housing sector has not been negative.

The outlook for the **public sector** remains subdued, at -4 this month.

The outlook for the **community sector** remained at -5 this month as practices continue to expect deteriorating workloads.

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



**RIBA Future Trends August 2024:
Staffing Index.**

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

Permanent Staff	%
Decrease	7
Stay the same	80
Increase	13
TOTAL	100
Balance	+5

(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 Permanent Staffing Index recorded a +5 balance figure in August, indicating that practices, on balance, intend to recruit permanent staff over the next three months. This three-point improvement from last month suggests growing confidence in longer-term prospects.

Thirteen per cent of practices anticipate an increase in permanent staff in the coming three months, 7% expect a reduction, and 80% expect no change.

All practice sizes are optimistic about future permanent staffing levels. Small practices have returned a +2 Staffing Index figure. Medium and large practices see staff recruitment growing in the coming months, with a +30 Staffing Index.

No region has a negative RIBA Staffing Index.

The weakest region for permanent staffing is the South of England, with a zero index balance.

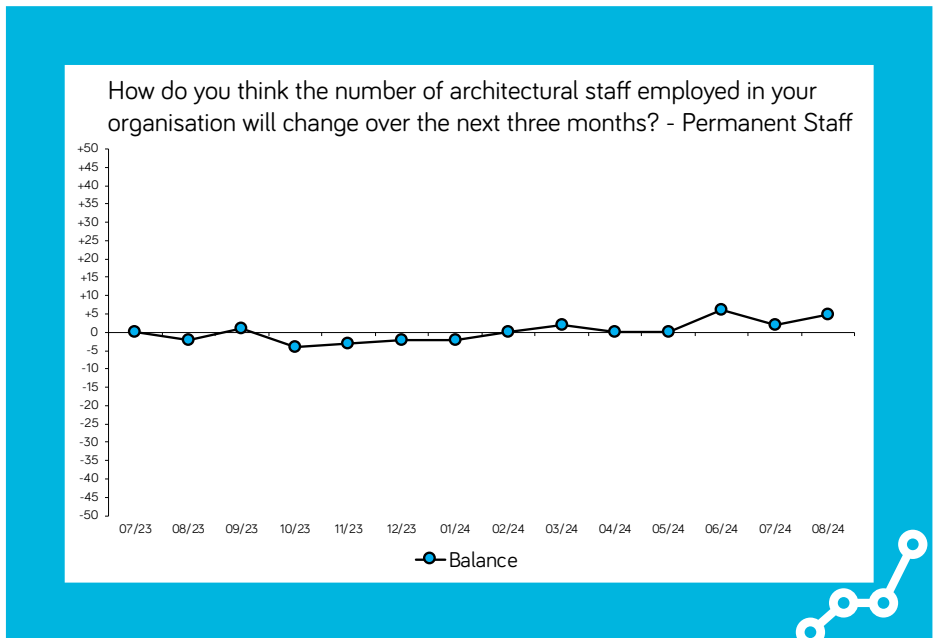
All other regions have returned a positive Index figure. In the coming three months, London (Staffing Index +2), the North of England (+6), Wales & the West (+11), and the Midlands & East Anglia (+13) all expect permanent staffing levels to grow, on balance.

In contrast, the RIBA Temporary Staffing Index has fallen to -8, the lowest level for over four years. Taken with the improving permanent staffing Index, this suggests practices are increasingly seeking to recruit and retain staff permanently rather than temporarily.

Levels of personal underemployment have remained steady as 26% of respondents continue to report 'a lack of work leading to personal under-employment' over the last month.

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.



August 2024 RIBA Future Trends: Commentary and Planning Delays

The RIBA Future Trends Workload Index remains positive at +2. However, the Index has yet to see a *resurgence* in overall confidence, and smaller practices have yet to anticipate near-term workload growth consistently.

Despite this, the strong and improving RIBA Permanent Staffing Index indicates that many practices are preparing for long-term growth by recruiting staff now. The gradual Housing Sector recovery is encouraging.

Commentary received in August notes that summer can be a quiet period, but workloads may increase as the year progresses.

Persistent issues continue to hinder the profession, including elevated interest rates, competition for architectural services from outside the profession, cash-flow challenges, and planning delays.

The new government has stated its intention to reform the National Planning Policy Framework and make other changes to the planning system. RIBA [backs reform to the planning system](#).

RIBA Future Trends has monitored the adverse effects of planning delays on project progress for the last three years. This month, we repeat the monitoring, primarily to provide a baseline from which we can assess the effectiveness of upcoming reforms.

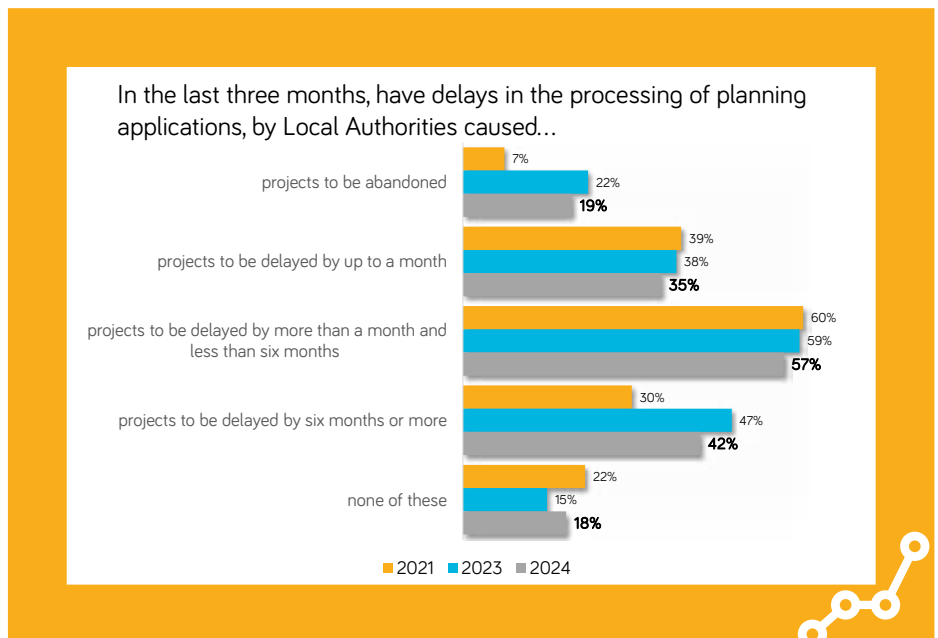
The current results show that delays in the planning system continue to delay projects or cause them to be abandoned. However, delays have slightly lessened when compared with the 2023 findings.

The following graph plots the effects of delays in the processing of planning applications:

In 2021 and 2023, we asked whether delays in processing planning applications by Local Authorities have caused project delays. In August 2024, we repeated the question. The findings are:

- Nineteen per cent report projects being abandoned in the last three months, compared with 22% in 2023 and 7% in 2021.
- Thirty-five per cent report projects being delayed by up to a month, compared with 38% in 2023 and 39% in 2021.
- Fifty-seven per cent report projects being delayed by between one and six months, compared with 59% in 2023 and 60% in 2021.
- Forty-two per cent report some projects being delayed by six months or more, compared with 47% in 2023 and 30% in 2021.
- Eighteen per cent of practices report no projects being delayed, compared with 15% in 2023 and 22% in 2021.

Overall, the speed with which planning applications are processed continues to hold back architects, the economy, and the creation of the buildings our country needs.



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 205 practices took part in the Survey in August 2024. 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.