Future Trends Survey:

September 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 September 2017 Survey returns.

Future workload (September 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	15
Stay the same	53
Increase	32
TOTAL	100
Balance	+17

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

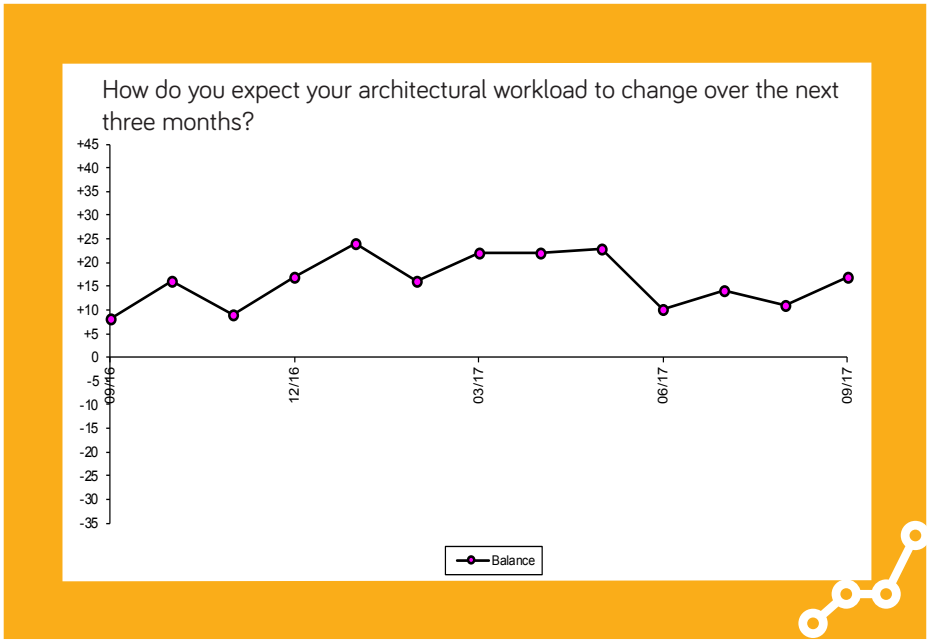
The RIBA Future Trends Workload Index recovered some recent lost ground this month, standing at +17 in September 2017 up from +11 in August.

In terms of geographical analysis, practices in the North of England (balance figure +29) and the Midlands and East Anglia (balance figure +26) remain the most optimistic about medium term workload prospects. Practices in London continue to remain much more cautious about future workloads, with a balance figure of -+7, but nevertheless this is the best figure for the London region for some time.

Analysing the September 2017 data in terms of practice size, large practices (51+ staff) returned a balance figure of +29 in September. Small practices (1 - 10 staff), with a balance figure of +15, and medium-sized practices (11 - 50 staff), with a balance figure of +25, continued to be less positive than large practices. This repeats the consistent pattern we have seen in recent months.

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.

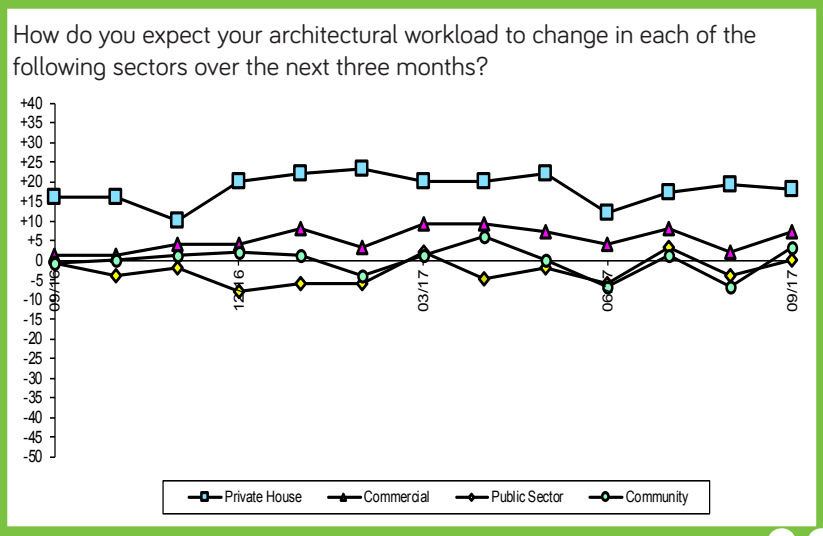


In terms of different work sectors, most of our sector forecasts saw upward movement in September 2017. The exception was the private housing sector workload forecast which fell back marginally to +18 in September from +19 in August. Overall though the private housing sector remains the most positive of all our sector forecasts.

The commercial sector workload forecast had a significant uplift this month, with a balance figure of +7 in September 2017, up from +2 in August.

Both the community sector workload forecast (balance figure +3) and the public sector workload forecast (balance figure zero) increased in September, but these remain the weakest of our sector forecasts.

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



Future staffing levels (September 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	7
Stay the same	81
Increase	12
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.)

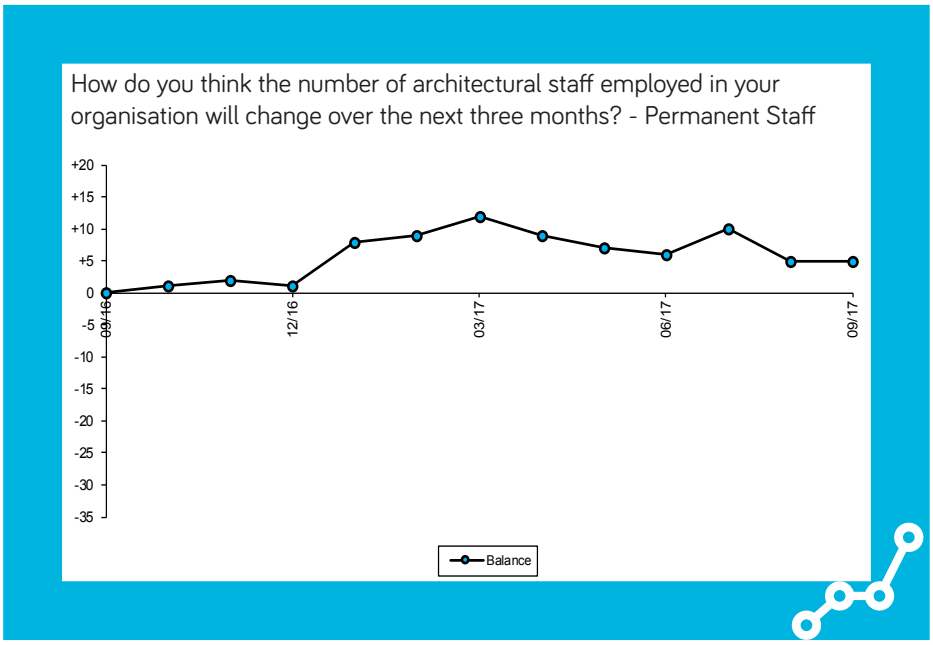
The RIBA Future Trends Staffing Index was unchanged this month, remaining at +5 in September 2017. On balance the majority of practices expect their permanent staffing levels to either remain the same or increase over the coming quarter.

Large practices (51+ staff), with a balance figure of +14, and medium-sized practices (11 - 50 staff), with a balance figure of +17, were more confident about future staffing levels than small practices (1 - 10 staff), with a balance figure of +3.

Commentary received from our participating practices suggests that whilst workloads are steady, there is something of a weakening in general business confidence that is beginning to become evident in the architectural market. Private investors, whether home owners or commercial developers, remain active, but the public and community sectors are still at a relatively low ebb, so any weakening in overall private sector confidence is a concern for the profession. Some practices have commented that the number of recent new instructions has been lower than anticipated.

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 207 practices took part in the Survey in September 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.