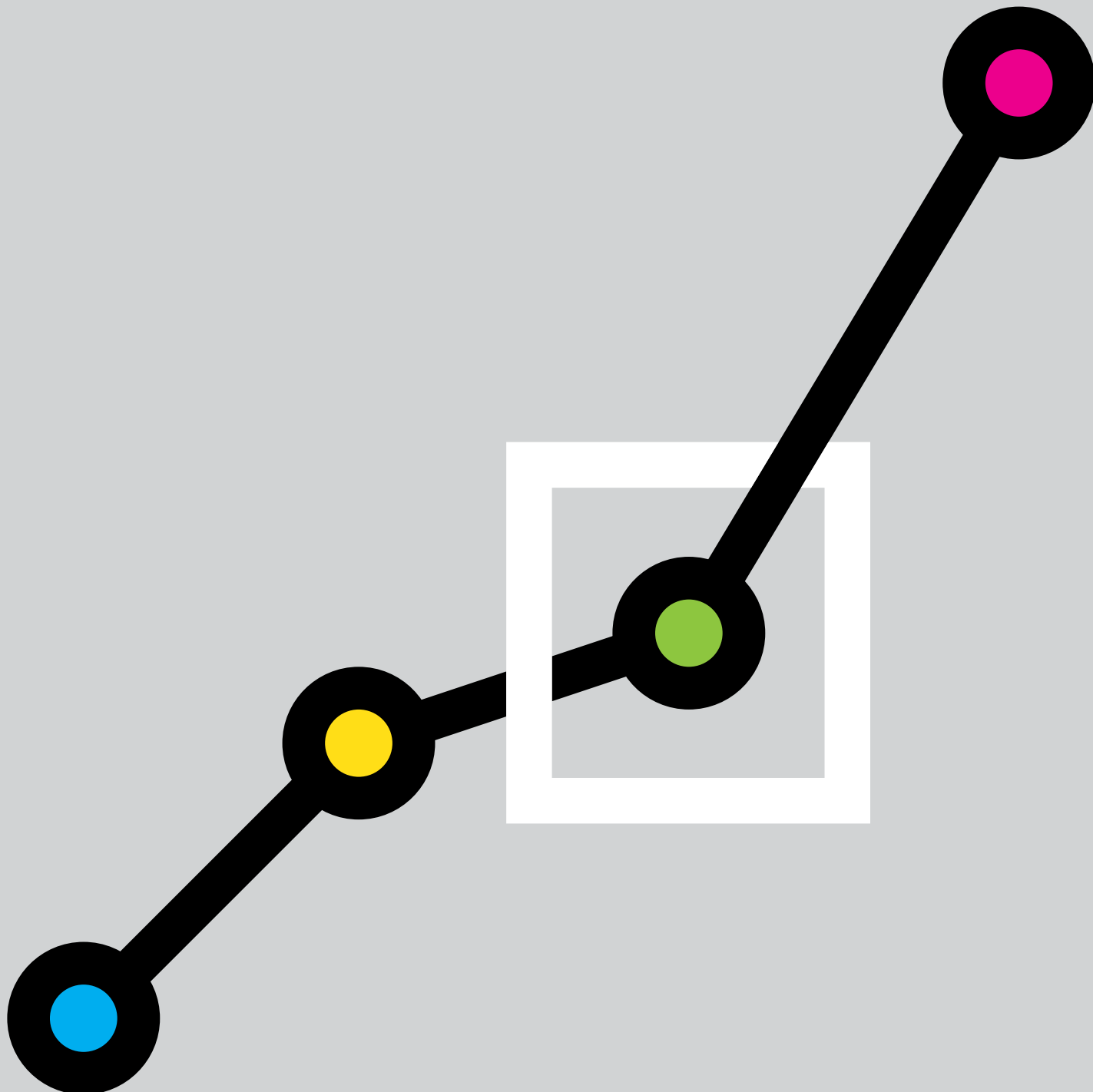


# Future Trends Survey:

December 2019



## 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 2019 Survey returns.

### RIBA Future Trends Workload Index (December 2019)

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	22
Stay the same	59
Increase	19
TOTAL	100
Balance	-2*

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

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

#### 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.

Responses received in December mostly came before the general election result.

The RIBA Future Trends Workload Index slipped back into negative territory in December with a balance figure of -2, a drop of 5 points. This follows November's positive balance figure of +3 which was a 13 point increase on October's figure.

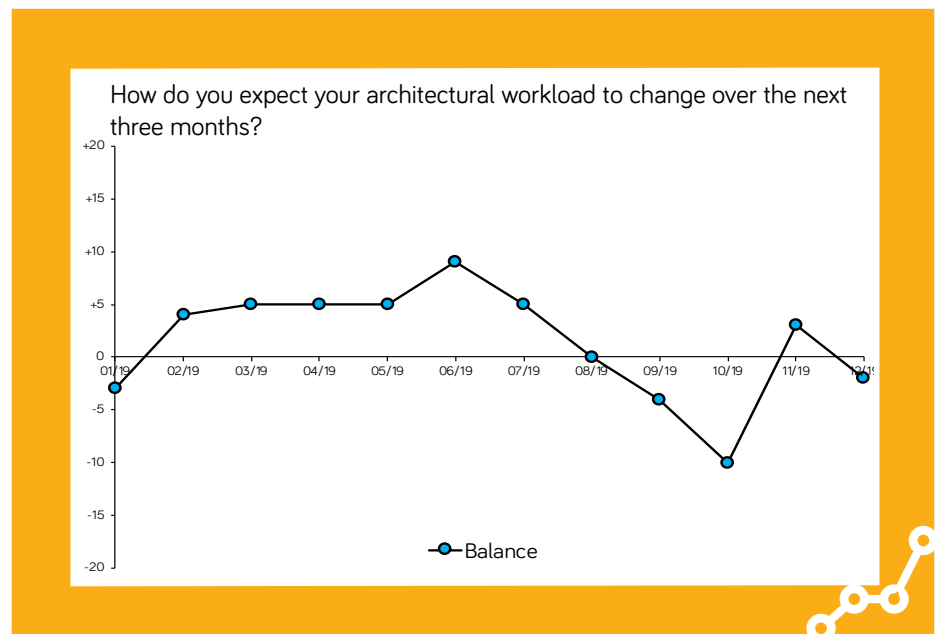
In November the index rose as uncertainty decreased, with a no-deal Brexit averted. In December the index fell as uncertainty increased, with the election.

The volatility of last quarter contrasts with the consistency of early 2019. Political and economic uncertainty makes it difficult for architects to assess future workloads.

Any increase in political and economic certainty, particularly around Brexit, would be welcomed, potentially allowing projects to progress, and client investment to be made.

However, in a context of sluggish growth in the wider economy, and weak construction output, it is not surprising to see a level of caution among architects.

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



Analysing the December 2019 RIBA Future Trends Workload Index in terms of practice size, region and sector we can see the following:

**Small practices** (1 - 10 staff) have again become negative about future workloads, returning a balance figure of -6, down seven points from the +1 balance figure in November.

Both **Medium-sized practices** (11 - 50 staff) and **Large practices** (51+ staff) continue to be positive about future workloads, with a combined balance figure of + 38.

In terms of the **regions**, London has reverted to a negative balance, dropping from a zero balance in November to -18 in December.

The Midlands & East Anglia has fallen further into negative territory. Having posted a balance figure of -6 in November, December sees a fall of 5 points to -13

The South of England has held steady, recording the same zero balance figure in December as November.

The outlook of practices in Wales & the West continues to improve, with a +14 balance figure this month, up 4 points from November.

Whilst slightly moderated, the North of England's continued positive outlook for future work continues. December saw the North of England post a balance figure of +14, down from +12 in November.

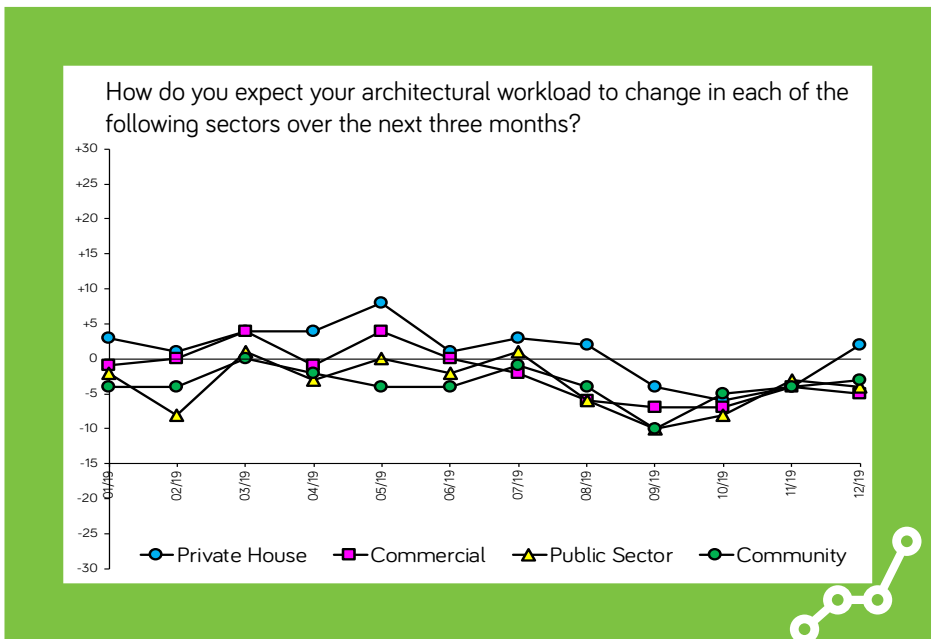
In terms of **different work sectors**, the most notable sector this month is the **private housing sector**, with a workload index rising 6 points to a modest positive balance +2. This follows three months of private housing being negative, the longest negative run since 2009.

The **commercial sector** remained negative, falling back a little from a balance of -4 in November to -5 in December.

Whilst still negative, the **community sector** saw its fourth successive rise; up to -3 in December, from -4 in November, and -10 in September.

The **public sector** fell back very slightly, from a balance of -3, in November to -4 in December.

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



**RIBA Future Trends Staffing Index**  
(December 2019)

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	84
Increase	9
TOTAL	100
<b>Balance</b>	<b>+2</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 RIBA Future Trends Staffing Index remained steady, with a balance figure of +2 in December, the same as November, suggesting continued stability in full-time staffing levels over the next three months.

The anticipated demand for temporary staff in the next three months, whilst remaining subdued, has increased to +2 in December, up from -2 in November.

In December 22 per cent of respondents told us they were personally under-employed in the last month, due to a lack of work. This is the same number as in November.

Reported under-employment is highest among small practices (1 - 10 staff) and among practices in London, the South of England and Wales & the West.

The commentary received in December reflects the negative balance in the RIBA Workload Index, the continued uncertainty around Brexit and its form, and, at the time, the future government.

The long-standing Brexit themes of projects failing to move past initial stages, and of downward pressure on professional fees, persist. Some practices are beginning to tell us of skills shortages, created by the Brexit process.

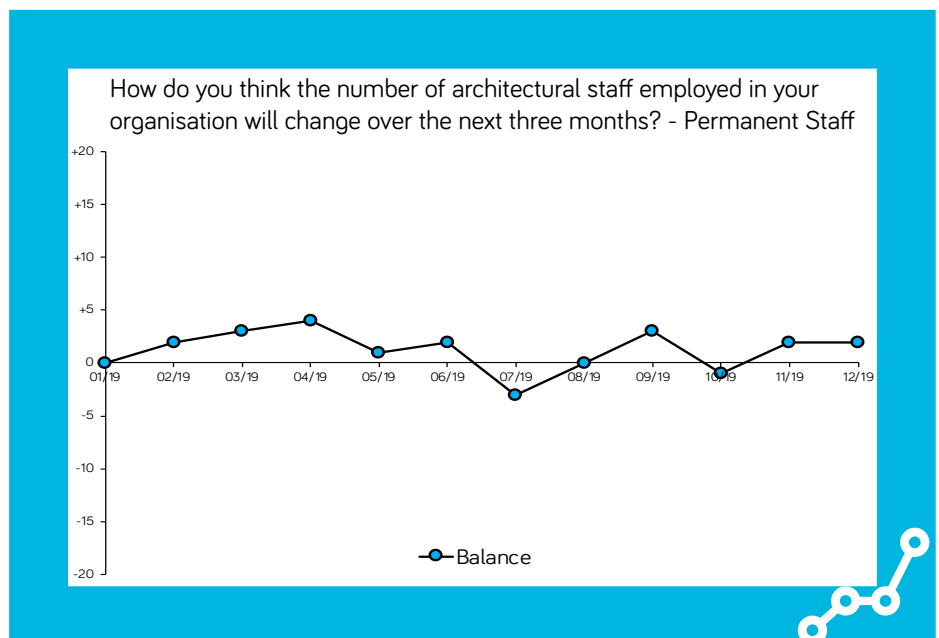
But there is optimism too. Some practices report an increase in enquires, and a noticeable pick up in work. There is hope for a post-election bounce in architectural work.

As 2019 drew to a close, many practices continued to take a cautious, wait and see approach, still looking for greater certainty.

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 206 practices took part in the Survey in December 2019. 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.