

highlights

a weekly digest of recently released British Columbia statistics

Labour Force

- **British Columbia's unemployment rate increased substantially in August, rising 0.7 percentage points to 7.9% (seasonally adjusted).** The size of the labour force shrank 0.3% between July and August, but even with fewer people either working or looking for work, the relatively low unemployment rates seen earlier in the year were unsustainable as employment fell (-1.0%) for the third time in as many months. During the spring, BC's jobless rate dropped below the national average, and stayed there, for the first time since 1998.

Canada's jobless rate rose moderately (+0.2 percentage points) in August, increasing to 7.2%. However, the rise in the national unemployment rate was due to a growing labour force (+0.2%), combined with a modest drop (-0.1%) in employment. Unemployment rates were up in six of the provinces, with BC posting the biggest increase.

Source: Statistics Canada

- **The unemployment rate for young people (aged 15-24) rose 2.0 percentage points to 14.5% (seasonally adjusted) in August, more than double the average (6.7%) for those aged 25 and over.** Men of all ages continued to experience higher unemployment rates (8.3%) than women (7.4%).

The number of people with part-time jobs fell 3.6%, while full-time employment shrank 0.3% between July and August. Self-employment was down (-0.7%), as was employment in the private sector (-1.5%), but there was a slight increase (+0.3%) in the number of public sector workers.

Source: Statistics Canada

- **Among the regions, jobless rates ranged from a low of 6.4% (3-month moving average) in Kootenay to 10.5% in Cariboo.** Thomp-

son/Okanagan (10.3%) was the only other region with a double-digit unemployment rate.

Source: Statistics Canada

The Economy

- **Wages, salaries and benefits earned by BC workers were unchanged (seasonally adjusted) in June.** Labour income rose in most parts of the country, at rates ranging from +0.2% in Quebec to 2.0% in Prince Edward Island. BC, Saskatchewan (-0.1%) and New Brunswick (-0.3%) were the only regions where earnings were flat or declined from May to June. Nationally, labour income was up 0.3%. *Source: Statistics Canada*
- **Investment in residential construction in BC dropped 2.8% in the second quarter of 2001, compared to the same period last year.** The decline was largely due to less money being spent on alterations and improvements (-15.6%). Alteration and improvement expenditures were down for the first time in two years, possibly because repairs to many leaky condo units have now been completed. Fixing the leaks has been a contributing factor in residential investment growth during the last two years. Investment in new construction projects was up 9.1% in the second quarter, largely due to a 52.0% increase in apartment construction. Nationally, investment in residential construction grew 6.4% in the second quarter of 2001. *Source: SC & BC STATS*
- **The value of building permits issued in the province rose 5.2% in July (seasonally adjusted).** The driving force behind this was non-residential permits, which climbed 15.3% as planned spending on industrial (+49.8%) and institutional and government (+60.2%) projects increased. However, the value of permits issued for commercial projects dropped 12.4% between June and July, and permits for residential con-

Did you know...

Population density in urban areas is declining. In 1971, the average density in Canadian cities was 1,030 people per square km. The figure had fallen to 799 by 1996.

struction projects were down 2.9%. Canada-wide, the value of building permits remained almost flat (-0.1%) as a drop in the residential sector (-10.2%) dominated an increase in non-residential permits (+13.9%). Ontario (-2.4%) and Quebec (-8.1%) were among the provinces that posted a fall.

Source: Statistics Canada

- **Relative to July 2000, the value of building permits (unadjusted) increased in every region of BC except Kootenay (-25.2%) and Nechako (-26.2%).** Total permits were 16.1% higher than a year earlier. The value of permits issued in Thompson/Okanagan (+46.3%) and Cariboo (+48.3%) rose substantially, largely due to planned spending on non-residential projects. Permits for residential construction were down in the less populous regions, but increased in Vancouver Island/Coast (+12.8%), Thompson/Okanagan (+24.7%) and Mainland/Southwest (+26.6%).

Source: Statistics Canada

- **Department store sales in BC and the territories rose 10.8% in July, compared to July 2000.** So far this year, sales have grown 9.8% over the same period of last year. Across the country, sales in July increased in all regions except Nova Scotia (-0.4%). Newfoundland/PEI (+19.9%), Alberta (+14.3%) and BC/the territories were the only regions with double-digit gains. Canadian sales were up 7.5%.

Source: Statistics Canada

- **BC's help-wanted index slipped (-0.8%) in August.** The Canadian index fell 1.3% with the largest declines seen in Quebec (-2.7%) and Ontario (-2.4%).

Source: Statistics Canada

Lumber

- **The volume of lumber shipped by BC sawmills and planing mills fell 4.5% in the second quarter of 2001, compared to the same period last year.** Shipments from the coastal region of the province were down 25.0%, as producers cut back their output in the face of uncertainty about countervailing duties on softwood lumber exports to the US, the biggest market for BC softwood lumber.

Nationally, shipments decreased 2.9% from second quarter of 2000 levels, but were up 5.0% from first quarter 2001. Saskatchewan (-40.8%) and

Quebec (-6.5%) were the only provinces other than BC where the volume of shipments fell. Despite the decline in total shipments, second quarter exports to the United States grew 11.0% at the national level.

Source: Statistics Canada

Adult Education

- **One in three (35%) Canadians between the ages of 25 and 65 participated in adult education programs during the period from 1994 to 1998.** Participants were most likely to be young, employed and in white-collar occupations. People with relatively little schooling and low literacy levels—who might benefit the most from training—were less likely to enroll in these programs. Among 22 countries studied, participation rates in adult education programs were highest in Finland (56%) and lowest in Portugal (13%). The overall average was 34%.

Source: SC, The Daily

Land Use

- **Only 1% of the province's total land mass is classified as high-quality agricultural land.** Nationally, 5% of the land is considered dependable (i.e., not susceptible to drought, floods, or other problems such as soil quality). BC's share of that total is just 2%. Seventy-one percent of the dependable land is in the prairies, with Saskatchewan (36%) holding the biggest share. Despite having the smallest share of good farmland (0.9%) in the country, PEI is the province where the largest percentage (71%) of farmland is suitable for most crops.

- **From 1971-1996, the area of urban land in BC more than doubled (+122%) as cities and towns throughout the province grew.** Urban land expanded from 1,600 square kilometers in 1971 to 3,500 in 1996. This was the third largest increase in Canada, behind only Prince Edward Island (+143%) and Alberta (+132%). Canada-wide, urban land area grew 76%, expanding over 12,000 square kilometers. Of the 28,000 square kilometers of urban land in Canada, over half (15,000 square km) is prime agricultural land.

Source: SC, Catalogue 21-006-XIE

highlights, Issue 01-36
September 07, 2001

Computer Training in the Workplace

Statistics Canada launched the "Workplace and Employee Survey (WES)" a few years ago and the results are now slowly being released. The survey is designed to answer a broad range of issues related to the dynamics of the workplace from both the employer's and the employee's perspective. One of the topics explored is the firm's formal on-the-job/in-the-classroom training. Below, we look at what employers are doing to keep their employees up-to-date on computer technology.

The study confirms that computer technology plays a immense role in the Canadian workplace. In 1999, 6 out of 10 Canadian workers used computers in their job and 7 out of 10 companies had at least one worker in the workplace using a computer.

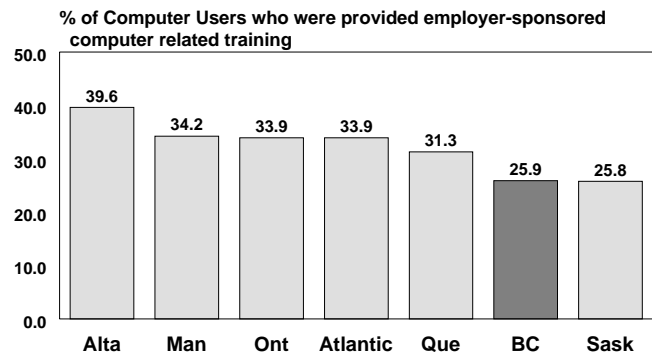
Employers verify there is a continuous necessity to update their computer technology. This entails investment, not only in the upgrading of hardware and software products, but also in the training of staff. In those years that employers undergo major upgrading, their investment in human skills can be costly, not only from the standpoint of providing formal training, but also from the temporary loss of staff productivity.

Computer training is also necessary in those years when existing systems are just being maintained. Employee turnover and mobility means new staff have to be trained and the usual refresher courses or general upgrading of generic computer skills must be ongoing.

There is a large divergence in the incidence of computer training depending on whether or not there has been an introduction of new technology. For this reason, it is necessary to separate out those firms that undergo a shift in technology vs. those that maintained the status quo when doing any analysis on the topic.

In fiscal 1999/2000, one quarter of all businesses introduced a major new software application or hardware installation. Among those firms that did, the chart below shows that the extent of employer computer-related training was fairly low right across the country, but particularly in BC and Saskatchewan.

Employers* in BC have one of the poorest records in providing their staff with formal computer training - 1999



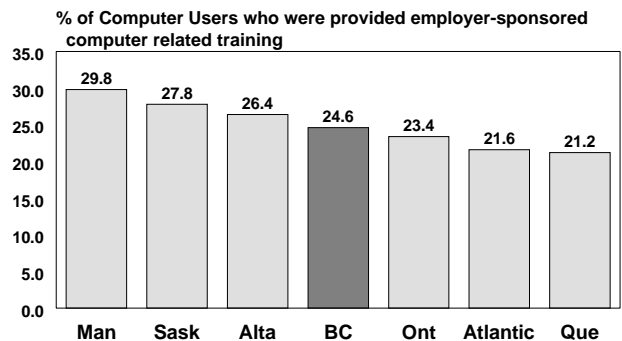
*Employers that Implemented System Updates in 1999

The second chart shows how much formal computer training is carried out just to ensure employees keep up their skills. The Prairie Provinces appear to do the most of this type of ongoing training. Although BC employers do not appear to be as far behind in this regard, the bottom line is that in 1999, BC employers provided formal computer training to only one in four of their computer users, which is one of the lowest rates in the country.

Interestingly, formal employer training courses comprise a small percentage of total training. Only 23 per cent of those employees learned their main workplace computer application through formal training. Instead, by far the most common method of learning was self-learning (45%) and/or being taught by a co-worker (44%).

Employers response to one of the survey's questions was that an adequately skilled workforce impeded their ability to implement major upgrades to their computer technology, yet they did not seem to be very inclined to invest in those skills themselves. Perhaps investing in highly transferable computer skills is too high risk for employers, particularly in times of skill shortages and rising wages—there is too great a threat they will lose their trained staff to other employers. If this is the case, it may be of value to introduce incentive programs that will encourage employers to keep their computer staff up to date in this fast-moving, competitive sector.

Prairie employers* come out on top in providing ongoing employee training to maintain a computer literate workforce



*Employers that Did Not Implement System Updates in 1999

 fax transmission information service from **BC STATS**

 Email transmission information service from **BC STATS**

 also on the Internet at <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca>

BC at a glance . . .

POPULATION (thousands)	Apr 1/01	% change on one year ago
BC	4,087.2	0.8
Canada	30,949.9	0.9
GDP and INCOME		% change on one year ago
<i>(BC - at market prices)</i>	1999	
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (\$ millions)	118,783	4.2
GDP (\$ 1992 millions)	104,323	2.1
GDP (\$ 1992 per Capita)	25,899	1.3
Personal Disposable Income (\$ 1992 per Capita)	16,700	0.0
TRADE (\$ millions)		
Manufacturing Shipments (seas. adj.) Jun	2,902	-8.7
Merchandise Exports (raw) Jun	2,771	-3.8
Retail Sales (seasonally adjusted) Jun	3,178	6.6
CONSUMER PRICE INDEX		% change on one year ago
<i>(all items - 1992=100)</i>	Jul '01	
BC	116.3	1.8
Canada	117.1	2.6
LABOUR FORCE (thousands)		% change on one year ago
<i>(seasonally adjusted)</i>	Aug '01	
Labour Force - BC	2,100	-0.5
Employed - BC	1,935	-0.6
Unemployed - BC	165	0.3
	Aug '00	
Unemployment Rate - BC (percent)	7.9	7.8
Unemployment Rate - Canada (percent)	7.2	7.1
INTEREST RATES (percent)	Sep 5/01	Sep 6/00
Prime Business Rate	5.75	7.50
Conventional Mortgages - 1 year	6.20	7.90
- 5 year	7.45	8.25
US/CANADA EXCHANGE RATE	Sep 5/01	Sep 6/00
<i>(avg. noon spot rate) Cdn \$</i>	1.5517	1.4836
<i>US \$ (reciprocal of the closing rate)</i>	0.6423	0.6749
AVERAGE WEEKLY WAGE RATE		% change on one year ago
<i>(industrial aggregate - dollars)</i>	Aug '01	
BC	642.30	-0.1
Canada	636.27	2.7

SOURCES:

Population, Gross Domestic Product, Trade, } Statistics
 Prices, Labour Force, Wage Rate } Canada
 Interest Rates, Exchange Rates: Bank of Canada Weekly Financial Statistics
 For latest Weekly Financial Statistics see www.bank-banque-canada.ca/english/wfsgen.htm

BC Economic Account

Now Available Electronically!

The diskette version of the British Columbia Economic Accounts (covering the period from 1961 to 1999) is now available. Included in this diskette are annual and quarterly, raw and seasonally adjusted, estimates of all components of the income and expenditure accounts.

For more information, or to order your copy of the diskette, contact Kris Ovens at (250) 387-0359.

Released this week by BC STATS

- Tourism Sector Monitor, August 2001
- Immigration Highlights, Second Quarter 2001

Next week

- Labour Force Statistics, August 2001
- Current Statistics, August 2001
- Quarterly Regional Statistics, 2nd Quarter 2001