Forum

Letter from the Managing Editor

■ We always hope that the topics we select and the analysis we present are of interest to readers. And most of our efforts appear to be well received. But, every once in a while, an article draws an exceptional response. Such was the case with Dave Gower's article "The booming market for programmers" in our Summer 1998 issue.

Of course, we had expected better-than-average feedback, given the continued public interest in computer developments, generated by issues such as the Y2K problem. But, frankly, even we were surprised by the strong response from both the media and our general readers: our phones just kept ringing.

We appreciate your interest in this subject and your need for timely information. And so we asked Dave to prepare the brief update that follows.

Henry Pold
Managing Editor
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Computer programmers

This note updates employment data for computer programmers and systems analysts, to the second quarter of 1998.[1]
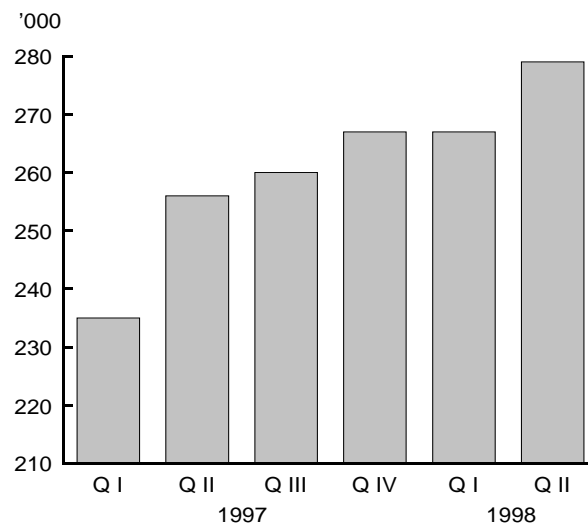
The previous study focused on trends to the end of 1997. In the preceding five years, the number of jobs had risen by over 90%. In spite of this sharp increase in demand, average weekly hours were about the same for programmers as for other scientific and technical workers. At the end of 1997, programmers' average pay ($843 per week or $22.24 an hour) was close to that of comparable workers.

Employment was flat at the beginning of 1998. By the second quarter, however, growth had resumed, and employment had risen to nearly 280,000 (Chart). Since the end of 1992, the number of jobs for software workers has now doubled.

Not surprisingly, the number of programmers reporting unemployment has remained low. During the first two quarters of 1998, the rate hovered around 2%, about half that of other scientific and technical workers, and less than one-quarter the rate for the labour force as a whole.

Pay for programmers and systems analysts continues to keep pace with that of comparable workers. In the second quarter of 1998, software workers averaged $863 per week, slightly less than that of other scientific and technical workers ($894), but much higher than that of the Canadian workforce as a whole ($583). This continues the trend seen since the beginning of 1997 (when earnings data first became available from the Labour Force Survey).   □

Employment for computer programmers levelled off, then rose again in 1998.

Source: Labour Force Survey

■ *Note*

1   For definitions and a detailed look at past trends, see "The booming market for programmers," *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 75-001-XPE) 10, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 9-15.

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