How do we deal with mixed ability? All groups have to deal with the problem and the computer club is no exception.

For children within a family or a school class it could be that some are brighter or work harder to progress more quickly. The same might apply to adults, but there is another complication – life and career experience.

Today's more mature people grew up in a world where computers didn't exist. Some may have been introduced to computers during their office life; others come fresh to them only recently - perhaps because they want to keep up with the grandchildren - and are complete beginners.

Even amongst those who are familiar with computers there are differences. One person might be accomplished in one area of computing such as writing documents, but have no idea what to do with a new digital camera. He could be quite expert at sound manipulation, but have no knowledge of spreadsheets.

As time goes by the difficulties are getting more significant for several reasons.

The scope of computing has increased enormously in recent years due to the advent of affordable technology such as digital cameras, video cameras, internet telephony, social web sites and mobile phones that act as cameras and web browsers. Just as families have more than one TV at home, they may now have more than one computer.

As well as the developing hardware, the software is expanding in scope, size and capability.

The hardware and software is converging and becoming intertwined, sometimes to a degree that will take a bit of getting use to. (An email can get a reply in minutes; a letter would be answered in days – or weeks if it was to somewhere overseas.)

Consequently, there are new subjects to talk about which squeeze the time available to talk about the basics. Some members would like instruction on how to do things and others would prefer to develop a more general view of what computers are able to do and open new horizons for them.

In the past we have coped by devoting part of the year to beginners and then, after giving them a boost, treating all members as improvers.

The 'Hints and Tips' evening alone has reached the point that it is no longer possible to demonstrate them all in a single session and could absorb several meetings.

All of this means the decision about the content of talks is critical in order to satisfy as many members as possible.

It might lead to the meetings being split into two parts. A short informal, expertise-sharing session (15 – 20 minutes) about doing a small task efficiently in one tiny corner of computing, followed by a talk (40-45 minutes) illustrating a broader topic in another area; the broader topic intended to raise awareness of possibilities rather than 'how to'.

The wider view could be of general computing interest.   Some evenings could be given over to workshops.   It is up to the members to decide what they want.

Our AGM on 11th January could be a very lively meeting.