Home Computer Course almost as prominently as the computers themselves.

Most home computer owners use BASIC, by far the most popular programming language because of the ease with which it can be learned. A complete course in BASIC, in 24 parts, runs through The Home Computer Course. But computer literacy demands some appreciation of other programming languages, such as PASCAL or LOGO, which is intended especially for educating children. That is why, in these pages, you will find attention paid to some of these other languages, of which there are hundreds.

In the future there will almost certainly be an increased use of 'program generators' and very high-level languages, both of which make it easier for the user to convey his requirements to the computer. Functional languages will enable us to tell a computer what to do rather than, as at present, telling it how to do the task. And computers will become 'expert systems', sources not only of factual information but also of advice. Remarkable and fascinating though they are, today's personal computers are primitive in comparison with what will soon be available. We cannot make reliable predictions for more than a few years ahead, but those who become deeply involved with the present generation of home computers will be well placed to understand future developments.

Some of those who work assiduously at learning to program their own computers are motivated by a wish to enter the computing profession. This is a reasonable aim, but it must be kept in perspective. Those who complete the Basic Programming Course in this work will have some appreciation of the gulf between writing programs for home use and designing software of professional quality for serious business applications. You would not expect someone who had built a successful model aircraft from balsa wood to be entrusted with the design of a supersonic airliner, and there is at least as great a gap between the hobbyist who can make money from developing a new game and a software engineer who can earn a living in industry.

Of all human artefacts, the digital computer is unique in its flexibility. Its capabilities are completely determined by the programs that control it, and their scope is limited only by the creativity and ingenuity of the program designers. To master the computer calls for equal flexibility in human beings. The advent of the home computer can be expected to promote the necessary adaptations in the population at large and to spur school students towards careers in 'information engineering'. This is a healthy trend, and one that is necessary for our economic survival. The Home Computer Course will contribute to these developments.