

Introduction to the 2005 CD-ROM Professional Edition of the Knowledge Base of Futures Studies

Since the original introduction to the 1996 edition was written the KBFS went through two printed editions and a Millennium Edition CD-ROM (2000). The latter was quickly taken up around the world and used in a variety of contexts. Its value as a resource in post-graduate FS courses was demonstrated at the Australian Foresight Institute. In fact the first course unit (Introduction to the Knowledge Base of Futures Studies) was based on it. As Prof Wendell Bell kindly observed of the hard copy edition, 'for many decades to come these volumes will remain the standard by which all other work in the field will be judged.'¹ Others called the CD-ROM a 'one stop shop' and 'an ideal introduction to the field.'

One of my greatest pleasures in teaching FS in tertiary contexts has been the experience of the first day or two of a new course, when people have had some time to peruse the KBFS CD and to begin considering the implications. The first meetings of a new group of mid-career post-grad students are among the most stimulating encounters I can recall. Everyone has taken a different path through the material. Everyone has questions, comments, ideas that need to be articulated and discussed. The energy level is high. What the KBFS allows people to do is to *orient* themselves in what, to many, is a completely new area; to begin to create their own 'maps', their own unique understandings regarding 'what FS is all about'. I was therefore delighted when in 2002 a group of University of Houston, Clear Lake, Futures Program students voted the KBFS CD as 'the best futures resource available.'²

The 2005 Professional Edition has come a long way from the three-volume hard copy editions. In the latter were included some 55 main papers. Now there are over one hundred. Some of the material used in 1996 has dated and been dropped from the series. A great deal of new work has been included such that the work tracks the continuing evolution of FS over nearly a decade. The biggest shift over that time has been the rise of integral FS - a development that 'transcends and includes' so much of what went before. Far from dismissing earlier work (such as the US 'empirical' tradition with its near-exclusive focus on exteriors) integral FS honors it and, moreover, shows where, in a larger sense, it 'fits' in a greatly broadened and deepened perspective. With these developments FS can truly be said to have come of age.

The main additions to the 2005 edition are as follows:

- a new section has been added to volume two - critical practice;
- a new section has been added to volume three - integral futures;
- a new volume five has been added - synergies, case studies and implementation;
- fifteen new biographical accounts have been added to volume four; and,
- many new papers have been added to other existing sections.

Why a 'professional' edition?

The main reason is this. FS began as a mid twentieth century multi-disciplinary response on the part of many perceptive people to the emerging dilemmas of the modern world as they perceived them. The early pioneers were predominantly Western and they employed the materials that were available to them at the time. As time went by, however, new developments (including new practitioners, scholars, others) progressively added coherence, depth and symbolic power to the emerging field. As well, the latter become

increasingly international and multi-cultural.

The *starting points* for the field (i.e. simple futures concepts and tools) have never been simpler or more easily accessible.³ But what one might call the 'R&D front' has now reached a point where the field, and leading practitioners, are very well equipped indeed to tackle the multi-leveled, multi-dimensional challenges of the early twenty-first century. It's for this reason that I believe that the field has, indeed, come of age. If this is correct, it follows that FS is poised for a new period of expansion and growth.

Many more organisations and individuals will be turning to FS and its sister fields, applied (including strategic, or integral) foresight. In so doing they will need exactly the kinds of resources presented here. The term 'professional' is not meant to exclude post-graduate and other students who are beginning their own journeys of enquiry. Rather, it indicates that these resources also have wider uses. Planners, strategists, business people, political advisers, consultants of all kinds and many, many others will find that the Professional Edition of the KBFS gives them, and many of their clients, a 'fast-track' route into the heartland of the field.

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Notes

- 1 Wendell Bell, personal communication, 1996.
- 2 Reported at the 18th World Conference of the WFSF, Kure, Japan, November 13-16, 2002.
- 3 J Gidley, et al, *Futures in Education: Principles, Practice and Potential*, AFI Monograph 5, 2004, Melbourne.