Migrating to e in UK Further Education
This is an abridged and edited version of the ‘Models to enable students studying in Further Education to procure e-books to support education’ report by John Cox, Laura Cox and Mark Carden, March 2010

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Executive summary
Executive Summary

The E-books for FE project provides a core collection of e-books to all UK FE institutions, initially for five years, with the option to acquire additional e-book titles at discounted prices. However, the project itself cannot provide all the e-textbooks required for the wide range of FE courses available. This report, based on research and consultation with, among others, FE librarians, course team leaders and lecturers, VLE managers and students, looks at steps that could be taken to move the FE sector towards wider use of e-textbooks.

FE presents special problems in that courses, and the levels of study are very diverse, financial resources limited and management structure generally ‘corporate’, so that the decision-making process can be slow and complex. In addition, FE colleges are focused on tangible outcomes for their students, in the form of qualifications and certificates that lead directly to employment. This means that courses tend to have ‘set texts’ that are chosen by lecturers or course teams and are essential to a student’s studies, rather than supplementary or recommended reading. This has implications for the licensing of e-books.

Nonetheless, the survey on which this report is based shows considerable enthusiasm, particularly among students, for a move towards e-textbooks.

1 http://fe.jiscebooksproject.org
2 http://fe.jiscebooksproject.org/consultation-process/
The context:
Further Education in the UK
As of January 2010, there are some 426 FE colleges in the UK (www.aoc.co.uk/en/about_colleges/index.cfm): 353 in England, 24 in Wales, 43 in Scotland and 6 in Northern Ireland, though these numbers are likely to change, as colleges seek financial safety through mergers.

The total numbers of students enrolled in FE colleges in the UK in 2007-08 was just under five million: an estimated 1.12 million full-time and 3.88 million part-time. The following charts illustrate the wide range of levels and qualifications covered by respondents to the surveys, and also the range of subjects taught:
However, the overwhelming majority of FE students are studying vocational courses and as such they are the primary focus of this report.

Further Education in the UK is a substantial activity, with college annual revenues, excluding capital expenditure, totalling £8.5 billion. However, the financial resources available to FE colleges in the immediate future are likely to be limited. The budget deficit that has resulted from the current recession means that spending is very tight and may well inhibit any innovations that involve significant expenditure. In addition, libraries tend to be leanly staffed and therefore unwilling or unable to take on extra administrative work, particularly if it is of an experimental nature. They want solutions which ‘work first time’.
The FE college library
The primary responsibility of the FE library or ‘Learning Resource Centre’ (LRC) is to support teaching and learning, and to procure and make available resources, including textbooks that are selected by course teams or individual lecturers. The vast majority of libraries purchase multiple copies of core texts and single copies of recommended reading and reference material. E-textbooks already form a component – albeit a modest one – of FE library purchasing: 13% of survey respondents acquire e-textbooks with access limited to a certain number of users and 32% acquire e-textbooks with unlimited access.

In addition, 91% provide access to paid-for content from publishers and other vendors. 88% provide access to some or all of the 3,000 e-books provided through the E-books for FE project. These e-resources may be accessed in the college library, other parts of the college and remotely through secure authentication.

However, when it comes to access and authentication systems that will allow staff and students to access licensed e-resources remotely on the publisher’s or vendor’s server, over a third of colleges have yet to become Athens or UK Federated Access Management (Shibboleth) compliant. Until the overwhelming majority of colleges have such systems in place, the opportunity to expand e-textbook use will be limited.

In its report on its survey of Further Education for the LSC\(^1\) (Measuring e-maturity in the FE Sector, Becta, 2008), Becta noted that:

- 25% of respondents were e-enabled, 48% enthusiastic, 7% ambivalent and 19% late adopters;
- 61% thought use of e-resources was left to the discretion of individual teachers;
- While there has been significant investment in infrastructure, greater capacity – especially wireless networking – will be required if demand for e-resources and e-textbooks increases. Otherwise, any growth in remote or more personalised learning will be constrained.

The use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs)
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Under recent government initiatives\(^1\), FE colleges have implemented a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as part of a strategy to utilise digital technology to support face-to-face teaching and learning. 83% of the VLE managers who responded to the survey on which this report is based provide remote access to the VLE, which is most commonly used for:

- Student registration
- Authentication
- Campus information
- Course navigation
- Communication to/from students, including submission and return of work
- Content and content pointers/links
- Evaluation/assessment

However, the VLE’s potential as a fully integrated educational system has yet to be realised. For example, although access to the *E-books for FE* collection is provided to 88% of colleges, only 38% provide access through the VLE. Populating the VLE with teaching and learning content is left to individual departments or even individual lecturers. Where content has been uploaded or pointed to with links, it tends to be information freely available on the Web; there is little use of paid-for content such as textbooks.

Over two-thirds of VLEs are managed by a department other than the library, with the duty usually assigned to a manager with a wide responsibility for instructional technology and e-learning. While the VLE is the vehicle of choice for course packs, handouts, technical diagrams, tests, e-resources and e-learning tools, it is notable that e-textbooks are generally provided by the library, and are embedded in the VLE less often than other digital resources. In many cases, the VLE and the library appear to operate as separate domains.

Current practice in textbook acquisition and delivery in FE
Current practice in textbook acquisition and delivery in FE

★ In a study prepared for the JISC E-books Working Group in 2003 (A Strategy and Vision for the Future for Electronic Textbooks in UK Further and Higher Education, Education for Change & University of Stirling, 2003), it was noted that the use of textbooks in FE resembles that in the US, where the core text is ‘adopted’ and the course cannot be completed without it. The textbooks are geared closely to the specific qualification, and define the course of study and it is essential therefore that students have access to them.

★ Asked about how they access printed textbooks, over 85% of the students surveyed use the book itself, about 10% receive photocopies of the relevant sections from their lecturer and 4% do not use the textbook. Photocopies play a major role in providing course packs, handouts, technical diagrams and tests. Students mainly use the course website (or VLE) to access online resources, except where e-textbooks are involved, where access is via the library.

★ A substantial number of copies of textbooks are bought by individual students – almost one third of those asked bought their own books, either new or second-hand. Colleges are anxious to ensure that every student has access to the textbook for the course, and they wish to ensure equity of access by controlling the acquisition and distribution of textbooks themselves.

★ In some practical vocational subjects such as catering, hair and beauty, and the electrical trades, students have to purchase a ‘kit’ that provides them with basic equipment (e.g. aprons, scissors, catering knives); this has often included the textbook. One publisher (Pearson) reports a move away from including the textbook in the ‘kit’ in order to reduce the apparent cost; the student then has to buy the textbook or access via the college library.

★ Provision of print books through the college library assumes either limited access (for recommended reading titles that are not integral to the course content) or rationing of access if there are fewer copies available than there are students on the course. With print books, this rationing is simply implemented by imposing time limits [loan periods] on students’ use of the book.

★ With e-textbooks, the institution can license e-books which are accessible via a web browser interface within the library, the college or remotely. These may be fully downloadable or ‘tethered’ [the content is retained on a server and not fully downloaded to a device]. Institutionally-licensed e-textbooks can have restrictions limiting the number of times the content can be accessed or the number of simultaneous users, although unlimited access is often offered.
Implementing the use of e-textbooks
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The adoption of e-textbooks is being driven to some extent by student demand. Over 50% of students demonstrated that they were either moderately or very enthusiastic about using e-textbooks, with only 14% not enthusiastic at all. This enthusiasm is, perhaps unsurprisingly, strongly endorsed by VLE managers and echoed by course managers and lecturers.

One significant advantage of the digital textbook is that it may help students with print related disabilities, in that the display can be enlarged or converted to audio; and the digital product has a flexibility that by definition does not exist in print.

Despite students’ enthusiasm, only 12% are willing to pay for access to the e-textbook directly, although this figure increases to 29% if the cost is included in the course fee.

As far as most colleges are concerned, digital textbooks complement the printed textbook and other learning inputs: it is a case of ‘as well as’ rather than ‘instead of’. For digital textbooks to add value, they need to be created as digital products, with multi-media adjuncts, tools etc. Simply presenting a facsimile PDF of the printed textbook holds little attraction. Macmillan’s DynamicBooks [http://dynamicbooks.com] may be instructive as an example of editable, multimedia e-textbooks.

An overwhelming majority of librarians believe that they should be involved in the procurement, management and delivery of e-textbooks. Librarians are already involved in licensing e-resources of various kinds, including journals, datasets and other resources offered by JISC Collections, and are the college unit where expertise naturally resides. However, further progress in adopting e-textbooks has resource implications for the college, extending beyond existing library procurement processes. In particular:

- Purchasing digital content that does not replace printed textbooks will require additional funding.
- Licensing of digital content creates an administrative burden in the library, which will require staffing to accommodate it.
Implementing the use of e-textbooks 2 of 2

★ The management and import of e-book bibliographic records into the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) requires specific skills. During the JISC national e-books observatory project1, the variable quality of the received MARC cataloguing records had a significant impact on library workflows [http://www.jiscebooksproject.org/reports/librarian-focus-groups]. In addition, a high proportion of colleges have OPACs without the facility to import MARC records and require cataloguing records in a proprietary format. This issue needs to be addressed by publishers, aggregators and library systems vendors if e-book use and procurement are to be sustained in FE.

★ As mentioned on page 8, the network capacity available to most FE colleges will need to be increased and compliance with UK standard access and authentication systems achieved if the migration to digital textbooks and learning materials is to be effected.

1 http://www.jiscebooksproject.org
Challenges facing a move towards e-textbooks in FE
Special challenges facing a move towards e-textbooks in FE

★ Further Education colleges in the UK are very diverse, offering courses on a wide range of vocational subjects as well as academic courses from A levels to degrees. It is unlikely that a ‘one size fits all’ solution to the delivery of e-textbooks will be found.

★ The choice of course-books, whether ‘set texts’ or ‘recommended reading’, rests largely with course managers, with the librarian’s role being to buy chosen books rather than to develop a broader collection. The typical FE college management structure is corporate, with decision-making centralised in the senior management team. It is not unusual for IT, the VLE Manager and the library to report to different members of that team. This structure inhibits the development of digital initiatives unless expressly approved and encouraged by senior management.

★ Colleges, and the bodies that fund them, report that they are constantly short of money and subject to frequent cuts in funding. They tend to be tactical in their financial and operational management, responding promptly to demographic changes or other pressures. This limits their ability to fund and staff transformational projects over a longer term, unless supported by separate grant money. Moreover, two specific factors militate against a move to e-textbooks:

• The view expressed by colleges that digital textbook material was likely to be an additional learning input, rather than a straight replacement of the printed textbook; and
• The reluctance of colleges to make students responsible for buying their own core e-textbooks.

★ Implementing digital textbook or e-learning provision requires training both for teaching staff and for students. How this is provided differs between colleges, and may be the responsibility of the library or the VLE manager. More important, it involves resources, and senior managers are facing the challenge of resource allocation in a difficult budgetary climate.
The bigger picture
Supply chain considerations
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Supply chain considerations

Any consideration of a move towards e-books in FE needs to include the following points:

Library Access and Take-Up Rates
A constraint on FE college libraries providing wide access to printed textbooks is the need to purchase sufficient physical copies to allow access by the required number of students. In theory, a move to e-textbooks would greatly reduce this constraint. E-book usage research (including the JISC national e-books observatory project) shows that e-books (including e-textbooks) are accessed for relatively short periods by each user. Although a student might want to hold on to a copy of a printed textbook for a whole term, he or she might only use it (or access an equivalent e-textbook) for a few minutes or hours each day, reducing the overall demand on each ‘copy’.

In practice, publishers are not attracted to a model in which a library can halve its `copy count’ by moving from print to electronic (unless the copy price is doubled as a means of maintaining revenue). Libraries and publishers need to find ways to gain the benefits of the flexibility of electronic resources without making publishing economically unsustainable. There is little mileage in a business model that assumes a library can in effect lend a single electronic copy to all users, irrespective of the number of students.

Used Book Market
Of the 30% of students who buy their own textbooks, around 25% buy them second-hand. This represents a significant loss of revenue for publishers. E-textbooks are an opportunity for publishers to control this market, by imposing strong security controls on their content and limiting access to certain individuals or time periods. The example of CourseSmart1 in the USA is instructive: many e-textbooks are on sale for as little as half the price of their print equivalents; a major driver of this price reduction is the removal of the used book market. There is potential in the UK FE sector (in some courses) for e-textbooks to remove the used book market and thus reduce initial costs of new e-textbooks for students in general.

E-textbook Supply Chain
E-books potentially offer supply chain savings over print books in production, inventory, shipping and returns, which could create opportunities for cost savings or improved take up. However, these savings may be offset by higher costs in areas such as technology infrastructure, content enrichment and customer service.

1 www.coursesmart.com
VAT
Printed books are zero-rated for VAT in the UK (and commonly attract a reduced rate in most EU countries). E-books attract VAT at the standard rate (currently 17.5% in the UK), which makes them relatively more expensive than print books. Many colleges will be unable to reclaim the VAT paid on the purchases of e-textbooks to any significant extent, which represents a substantial additional cost.

Content and Purchase Deconstruction
Publishers are already experimenting with deconstructing content (e.g. selling individual chapters) and deconstructing purchase models (e.g. offering ‘rentals’ for periods of less than a year) or pay-per-use (usually the purchase of a set number of uses).

Content deconstruction could potentially be attractive to FE colleges and students, although it should be noted that the Copyright Licensing Agency’s FE licence [www.cla.co.uk/licences/licences_available/fe/state_fe_england] already grants FE colleges the right to photocopy or scan extracts and to deconstruct and distribute content in a number of physical and electronic ways.

There is also interest in rental models that put the e-textbook into the hands of the student for the duration of the course, but not for shorter periods. There is strong resistance to the idea of pay-per-use, due to concerns about budgetary controls and/or cost recovery processes.

Publisher and Intermediary Commercial Risk
The intermediaries in the current print and e-book supply chain such as aggregators, distributors, booksellers and consortia are all concerned about losing their role as e-books gain market share and as discovery, purchase and delivery become more automated. These organisations have a powerful incentive to find a continuing place for themselves in the supply of content. Intermediaries could perhaps buy (or commit to buy) e-book content in volume at better prices (insulating publishers from risk) in the hope of increased adoptions by institutions and increased take up by students.

There might be a role for government-funded bodies in reducing the risks perceived by both publishers and intermediaries by creating buying consortia, by providing the infrastructure, guaranteeing revenues and encouraging adoption.

One particular opportunity is for a publisher consortium or an intermediary to establish itself as the UK equivalent of CourseSmart in the USA, becoming the primary online
marketplace that students (and colleges) approach for educational content. This may happen through normal market forces, but could also be pump-primed by national initiatives.

**Technology Platforms**

At present, e-books can be delivered to small-screen devices (phones and PDAs), personal computers (PCs and Macs) and dedicated readers (mostly e-ink). In the case of e-textbooks, the majority of publishers limit their content to page by-page viewing in a browser, or downloading into a secure personal computer application such as the VitalSource reader (DynamicBooks, mentioned above, powered by VitalSource). Due to central initiatives such as MoLeNET1 there is already a culture within Further Education of using mobile devices in teaching and learning but in most instances the content used in these projects is limited to freely available or user generated content.

As the e-textbook market develops, it will need a robust platform, whether browser or download based, that will allow wide access by a diverse group of students at minimal cost. There is likely to be as much competition between publishers over such delivery platforms as there is over the content being delivered, which may create a familiarisation and training problem for colleges.

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1 www.molenet.org.uk
Possible solutions
Possible solutions

★ Given the opportunities and constraints set out above, the following business models could be of use to the FE community. In each case it is suggested that JISC Collections play an important role in:
- identifying colleges and courses for which the particular models could work;
- facilitating interactions between those involved;
- initiating pilot projects.

Strong Adoption
The ‘strong adoption’ model requires a mechanism whereby all students obtain a copy of the relevant e-textbook, ensuring that publishers sell lots of copies and would therefore accept a lower unit price.

★ This model is potentially attractive as it improves student access to content, offers a lower unit price to each student, provides a more consistent learning environment (improving both the student and instructor experience), gives control of the content delivery to the college and maintains publisher revenues.

★ The challenges include the identification of courses whose textbook would be suitable for electronic delivery, provision of appropriate technology infrastructure, and persuading colleges to mandate the purchase of the content and publishers to reduce unit prices. Consideration would have to be given to whether or not students would need access to the content after completing the course.

★ With these provisos, implementation should be relatively straightforward. An appropriate e-textbook could be delivered using existing publisher or aggregator platforms or through a download model such as VitalSource (or a combination of these). The pricing could be agreed between the publisher and the college, and students would either buy the content as a course participation requirement or be charged for it through a levy on the course fee, administrative/registration fee or the ‘starter kit’. It is noteworthy that the University of Phoenix (which is essentially a huge US commercial distance learning vocational college) has been providing mandatory course content as part of its learning packages for many years and successfully charges a standard $80 per course for this material.

★ It is recommended that a pilot project to implement this business model be initiated, with JISC Collections acting as a catalyst to bring together a publisher and a small group of colleges who would be willing to take part. The ideal target segment is a course where a suitable textbook can be electronically delivered and is not required after course completion, substantial course fees are already charged and students are likely to be technologically savvy.
Central Sales Platform

The Central Sales Platform model is similar to the CourseSmart initiative that has been created in the USA, where a multi-publisher repository offers downloadable e-textbooks for sale.

★ Such a service supports lecturers in selecting and buying appropriate-textbooks and provides the technology and security environment by which e-textbooks can be securely downloaded and productively used. It allows instructors to point students at a single source of content and provides students with a familiar and consistent interface. The platform can be used to sell complete e-textbooks and also smaller components such as chapters; ultimately this could reduce the photocopying costs incurred by generating multiple copies of handouts.

★ This solution could be created by a consortium of publishers (as with CourseSmart), by a central body or by a retailer. Some publishers and retailers already see this approach as a strong commercial opportunity, so it is possible that it will evolve as a result of market forces.

★ JISC Collections could provide some impetus by identifying an FE sector in which this solution could succeed and providing initial funding for a commercial organisation to create and implement an e-textbook sales platform for that sector, with a possibility of the funding being repaid in due course. Alternatively JISC Collections could form a joint venture with a retailer to create and deliver such a service on a co-branded basis.

Institutional E-textbook Licensing

A model whereby colleges can license content on an institution-wide basis, providing multi-user access, is constrained by and publishers’ potential loss of revenue from student purchases. The latter could be managed in one of two ways:

★ **Lost revenue accounting** means making some assumptions or estimates regarding what lost student sales would be if unlimited access to a library copy was available. The JISC funded; *Study on the management and economic impact of e-textbook business models on publishers, e-book aggregators and universities* might inform how such estimates might be calculated¹. A similar pilot project for FE could be established whereby selected core textbooks were made available in electronic form via a few college libraries, and the impact on student sales determined.

★ **Product polarisation** requires publishers to create two versions of the e-textbook content, in effect an institutional edition and a student edition. The student edition could be more attractive (perhaps offering more interactivity and rich

¹ [http://www.jiscebooksproject.org/business-models](http://www.jiscebooksproject.org/business-models)
content) while the ‘library version’ would provide an online version of the basic print book. This would mean that students had an incentive to buy a personal copy, but that those who were unwilling or unable to do this could access a ‘basic’ version via the library. Many publishers are already starting to produce ‘rich’ electronic versions of traditional paper textbooks with, for example, embedded video or assessments, and this could form the basis for the suggested polarisation.

These two elements could also be combined, with a pilot group of students being offered essentially the same content either as a sophisticated downloadable e-textbook or as a library-provided, browser-based PDF image of a traditional print edition. The user experience could be researched and data collected on the value presented by each version and the student preferences on cost and features. JISC Collections could underwrite such an experiment with a selected publisher partner and provide academic credibility and research credentials.

**Institutional and Student Loans**
Given the data available in this area, it would appear that two main options are worth pursuing: institutional e-textbook loans and student e-textbook and e-chapter loans.

For institutional loans, the most attractive approach would be a form of rolling subscription to content, in which the college would ‘draw down’ an appropriate amount of content to meet the needs of a particular course, and use the established subscription to access the latest editions of the same content in future presentations of the same course. This would give the publishers continuity of revenues (through some form of multi-year baseline subscription) and the opportunity to add value by renting the latest versions of recurrent texts, while giving the institutions increased flexibility and reduced risk of a build-up of obsolete materials. JISC Collections could participate in a pilot or full implementation of this model by facilitating the interaction, or by establishing a baseline ‘subscription pool’ of content to be drawn down by the colleges.

A direct-loans-to-students model could also be attractive for some courses and students. Rather than buying an e-textbook outright, the student could rent access to the content for a shorter period of time. This would be not appropriate for those core textbooks that are needed for the length of a course and/or continue to be useful after graduation, but would be suitable for content (more likely chapters than complete books) that needed to be studied in depth for a shorter period.
Summary of recommendations
Summary of recommendations from the Models to enable students studying in Further Education report, John Cox 2010

★ JISC’s Regional Support Centres have an important role to play in advising colleges how to organise themselves for the effective deployment of Information & Communications Technology, and they enjoy high regard for the support they provide to FE.

★ Few FE college libraries have the capacity to take on a new wave of complex negotiations. To deal with the range of usage rights required by students and their lecturers, they need simplicity, clarity and predictability. JISC Collections has considerable experience in facilitating model licences. It has set up a task and finish group to develop a model licence(s) for e-books that includes a common set of licensing terms and conditions that are easy to understand and communicate, meet the needs of educational users and are agreed by all stakeholders as fair. The group will include publishers, e-book aggregators and librarians.

★ It is recommended that JISC Collections establish pilot projects with publishers and with selected FE colleges in order to test the potential solutions outlined in this document. Pricing, access and usage rights need to be carefully formulated in each case. This will require further consultation with stakeholders in order to set measures against which the success or failure of each model can be assessed.

★ Feedback from the survey suggests that due to resourcing restrictions outlined previously, separate grant money would be required to enable FE colleges to engage in any pilot projects.

★ JISC should maintain and increase the level of guidance that it provides to FE colleges in order to put colleges in a position where they can make informed decisions on the adoption and implementation of e-textbooks. This should include development of best practices in VLE implementation and usage, and implementation of consistent access and authentication systems across the FE environment. At the same time, more central investment is required to increase colleges’ network capacity, establish authentication systems and train staff in the implementation and use of digital materials. Publishers must continue to develop and provide more wide-ranging and more sophisticated digital content and JISC Collections should continue to provide this to colleges by building on the platform established by the e-books for FE project.

★ In the interviews with colleges, it was made clear that digital textbooks are seen as complementing the printed textbook and other learning inputs. It is a case of ‘as well as’, rather than
Summary of recommendations from the Models to enable students studying in Further Education report, John Cox 2010 2 of 2

‘instead of’. This is consistent with publishers’ expressed view that the future lies in ‘blended learning’, in which the printed textbook may become smaller, complemented by a range of digital teaching resources.

Pricing models for e-books should recognise actual use and that students are using e-books in addition to the textbooks they have bought or borrowed.

★ JISC Collections should also continue to develop the e-books model licence that can be used for all e-textbook licensing in FE colleges in the future. It should not, of course, address pricing issues, but should set out minimum usage rights for effective deployment in colleges. This should include, where appropriate, the acquisition of instructors’ support material as part of the licence and its use for all normal teaching and learning applications within the college. Licences for e-books should clearly state provisions and timescales for content updates.

★ The very diversity of FE colleges makes it unlikely that any single solution will fit all requirements and their lack of funding makes it difficult for them to implement innovations without support.

One of the more unexpected findings of the e-books for FE project, was that the provision of the ‘right’ content such as vocational textbooks can act as a conduit for change and encourage the adoption of e-resources and authentication systems. Since the start of the project, with thanks to the JISC Access Management Team, the number of colleges with remote off campus access to electronic learning material has increased dramatically (c.30%). It is clear that more e-books and e-content, in levels and subjects relevant to FE are required to stimulate the investment in infrastructure to move away from paper handouts to personalised, online, 24/7 teaching and learning. Online content including e-books needs to be both affordable for colleges and sustainable for publishers. E-books are still very much in their infancy, and in spite of the popularity of the e-books for FE Project, e-books are seen as complementary not a straight replacement of print textbooks.

Pricing and business models for e-textbooks should recognise their supplementary use in FE and recognise that the majority of colleges do not yet have the capacity and infrastructure to exploit e-books to their full potential.

The study outlines a number of feasible models for college and student purchase of textbooks, but they can only work in tandem with relevant content, infrastructure and with a willingness and capacity from publishers and colleges to experiment. Anna Vernon, e-books for FE Project Manager.
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- South Thames College
- Stephenson College of Further Education
- Strode College
- VitalSource
- W H Smith
- Waterstones
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