



Case Study

University College of Estate Management

Digital education delivers consistent student satisfaction and enhances reputation benefits from a modern learning environment

University College of Estate Management (UCEM) introduced VitalSource eTextbooks as part of a broader transformation and modernisation. In the last four years, they have successfully transitioned from providing traditional distance learning to pioneering digital learning. Over 4,000 students in more than 100 countries now study wholly online, accredited courses at postgraduate, undergraduate, and apprenticeship levels.

Staff and students reflect on the journey, identifying the key challenges, critical success factors, and benefits.

The strategic view: Online makes us competitive

- **January 2014:** UCEM Programme Manager appointed
- **March–July 2014:** Phases 1, 2, and 3 commence, developing a total of 78 modules between July 2014 and March 2015
- **September/October 2014:** 9 postgraduate and 17 undergraduate modules go live
- **February 2015:** Online versions of all modules are available
- **March/April 2015:** UCEM begins investigating alternatives to the distribution of print textbooks
- **July–August 2015:** VitalSource selected as supplier for the delivery of module eTextbooks via the virtual learning environment
- **September/October 2015:** VitalSource eTextbooks provided to postgraduate and undergraduate students from the autumn semester

UCEM Principal Ashley Wheaton is accountable for everything from financial performance and academic delivery to student experience. With past experience at Microsoft, he is passionate about the application of technology in education.

“The evidence is plain to see. We have more than twice the number of students at UCEM than we did just four years ago.”

- Ashley Wheaton, UCEM Principal

He has taken a strategic approach at UCEM, having put in place the people, policies, and tools to ensure a consistent, high-quality learning experience—and the university is experiencing rapid growth.

Lynne Downey, Vice Principal – Online Education, believes it was essential for UCEM to embrace technology to facilitate their highly international audience, who include members of the military. Students can access the same learning experience wherever they are currently based. Replacing print materials with the provision of a digital learning environment and eTextbooks has provided greater flexibility as well as increased opportunities for students to connect with their peers and their tutors.

Investing in technology and student experience has repositioned UCEM and enhanced their reputation.

“It’s important that what we offer to students is equitable, and that they can have the same experience wherever they are in the world.”

- Lynne Downey, Vice Principal – Online Education

eTextbooks: In line with our ambitions

Ben McCammick-Copley, Media Production Manager, explains that the introduction of VitalSource eTextbooks was in line with UCEM's goal to provide a truly online learning experience. The platform needed to be flexible and accessible, but straightforward enough for a small team to administer. According to Ben, the VitalSource Bookshelf® platform "just seemed such a rounded offer, and it was ticking many of the boxes for us."

Lynne Downey has appreciated the transparency that learning analytics provide. Digital materials such as eTextbooks increase transparency, making student behaviour patterns more visible. At UCEM, analytics make it possible to see the uplift in usage of core content. This has a knock-on effect of providing better value for the university and for their students.

"The number of pages and the amount of usage those books get is massive."

- Lynne Downey, Vice Principal – Online Education



"We needed to look at a new way of delivering core texts that would be more in line with our ambitions to provide a truly online learning experience."

- Ben McCammick-Copley, Media Production Manager

A better way of teaching

Jane Ballantyne is UCEM's BSc (Hons) Building Surveying Programme Leader. Her initial reaction to eTextbooks was "I don't like this," but she is now converted, recognising they are particularly useful for subjects with a strong visual component. It allows learning materials to be more granular and gives students the choice between synchronous and asynchronous learning. The availability of the eTextbooks provides the flexibility her students need.

"The books are always there, and I think that is absolutely brilliant."

- Jane Ballantyne, UCEM's BSc (Hons) Building Surveying Programme Leader

Jane proactively uses the note-sharing tool in Bookshelf to mark up the eTextbooks before the course begins, then returns to the tool to answer student questions during the course. This responsive approach creates dialogue with the students.

Jonathan Hubert is BSc (Hons) Architectural Design Technology Programme Leader at UCEM. He welcomed the move from print to eTextbooks despite the initial challenge of bringing mature students on board with the technology. He is convinced that "there is a significant benefit over the printed book in that environment."

"... digital is a better way of teaching in terms of the impact on the students and their learning."

- Jane Ballantyne, UCEM's BSc (Hons) Building Surveying Programme Leader



“eBooks prompt more responses—you get to engage much more with those students. It becomes much more interesting for both parties and reduces the distance between lecturer and student.”

- Jonathan Hubert, BSc (Hons) Architectural Design
Technology Programme Leader

He was able to demonstrate their value to his students by incorporating eTextbooks and their functionality into his teaching. He shares notes and highlights to focus his students and encourage interaction.

The student view: Digital makes learning possible

When mature student Christopher Weaver was considering studying to facilitate a career change, he was concerned that it would be a challenge. “I had concerns with the time that I had to spare—I am working full time as well.” The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors directed him to UCEM.

“As soon as I saw it, I thought that’s spot on for me as I’m free to do it when it suits me, rather than days in university.”

UCEM records lectures, so students like Christopher are able to fit them in around work commitments. After their live broadcast, they are made available to students via links in the virtual learning environment alongside core learning materials such as eTextbooks.

“Without that, I don’t see how I’d have been able to do it and work as well.”

- Christopher Weaver, Mature Student

The availability and functionality of eTextbooks help him manage his learning. He says, “If I’m waiting somewhere, in the car or something, I’ll use my phone. It definitely helps me get more reading done. I like the search feature with the digital—you don’t have that with a print book. Normally if I’m referencing back to a certain part of the book, I can just use the search and it’ll take me straight to that part.”

Lecturers use notes and highlights to focus students on the most relevant material, and to enhance the content in order to drive improved learning outcomes. Christopher finds this a useful tool to maximise his study time. “It saves time—it does focus you on that particular part. They are pointing me here for a reason, so I tend to take that content in more.”

For Christopher, UCEM’s digital learning approach was essential. This backs up the positive student feedback received by UCEM staff. Students at UCEM find digital learning fits with their lifestyles. They appreciate the ability to learn both synchronously and asynchronously, and value the eTextbook tools that direct their learning.

Next steps: Extending eTextbook functionality across university-created resources

eTextbooks are not the only learning content used at UCEM. As students became accustomed to using VitalSource for their core reading, they began to request that university-created content have that same functionality. UCEM is now piloting VitalSource Studio™ to develop content that meets their needs and provides a consistent experience.

Implementing digital learning: Moving beyond business as usual

The team at UCEM see digital learning as an ongoing initiative and have ambitious plans for 2020. These include taking a new approach to assessment and the restructuring of their courses, which has been informed by their learning analytics.

As they come to the end of this phase of their project, Ben McCammick-Copley reflects on the early challenges experienced by UCEM when they sought to deliver change through a “business as usual” infrastructure. Without high-level support for the project, it struggled. A new principal with a strategic agenda brought resourcing solutions, but also tight timelines.

Lessons learned: Tips for institutions introducing digital learning

The UCEM team offer insights for staff considering introducing or expanding their digital learning.

For Principal Ashley Wheaton, adherence to a consistent approach across the learning environment is key to success. It allows you to say to students “once you have learned the format, you don’t have to learn it again.”

Despite the fact that online learning is not new, making the transition requires a pioneering approach and a team that is dedicated and enthusiastic.

Careful planning is essential, but it is important to accept that the plan may not work, and to monitor and adapt as necessary, according to Lynne Downey.



“Saying that it didn’t work is only failing if you don’t recognise you need to stop and do it a different way.”

- Lynne Downey, Vice Principal – Online Education

“I don’t think you can do this unless you’ve got a team that believes—people who have got the passion, but also the resilience and the will to keep aspiring to something better.”

- Ashley Wheaton, UCEM Principal

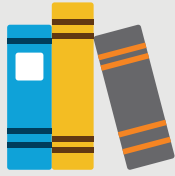
“You’ve got to get people using it, but also believing it—and that can be the real challenge.”

- Ben McCammick-Copley, Media Production Manager

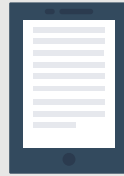
Ben focuses on the need to take the team with you, offering strong communications including mentoring, and allowing staff to play with the technology. This is easy to neglect when delivering technology across an institution against tight timelines. Ben argues that providing information alone is not enough to drive and cement the necessary cultural change.

UCEM by the Numbers

USAGE



84 titles



5.3 million
page views



700K
study sessions



500K+
highlights made



39K notes made



The average student spends **14 minutes, 35 seconds** in their **VitalSource eTextbook** per visit

A GLOBAL COHORT

Americas: **100**

Asia Pacific: **80**

Middle East and
Africa: **350**

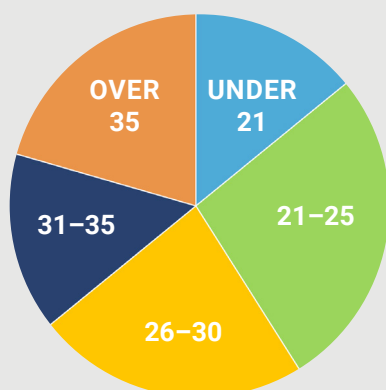


UK: Approx. **2,800**

HK: Approx. **500**

Europe: **90**

REACHING TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS



Under 21: **550 (14%)**

31-35: **600 (15.5%)**

21-25: **1,050 (27%)**

Over 35: **800 (20%)**

26-30: **900 (23%)**

UCEM & VitalSource

UCEM

UCEM is the leading provider of supported online education for the built environment, with almost 100 years of experience providing the highest quality learning opportunities. At any one time, more than 3,500 students from over 100 countries benefit from its qualifications taught by tutors with extensive industry experience.

UCEM helps to enhance built environment professional careers through its accredited property-related and construction programmes offered at postgraduate, undergraduate, and apprenticeship levels.

VITALSOURCE

VitalSource is a global leader in building, enhancing, and delivering e-learning content.

As the provider of Bookshelf, the world's #1 digital content platform, VitalSource is a proven innovator and trusted partner for institutions and publishers globally. They improve the learning experience by making it easy to create and deliver effective and affordable content. Bookshelf connects students to interactive, immersive content from over 1,000 global and local language publishers for study, in class or on the go.

