Since the turn of the millennium there has been an increase in the availability of digitised versions of books from a variety of publishers and covering a variety of types of content. Many academic institutions are making these web-based resources available as part of their digital/electronic library and they are also being used within Virtual Learning Environments. Students or researchers in these institutions are not always able (perhaps because of physical disabilities or because they are working at a ‘distance’) to visit the physical library to borrow printed books in the traditional manner and so access to the digitised books provided can be advantageous. Some e-books are published commercially (for instance from Springer, Wiley) whilst others are freely available through sites such as Project Gutenberg (http://www.gutenberg.org/). A number of ‘intermediary’ organisations have also appeared which offer access to a range of e-books from different publishers: netLibrary (now a division within OCLC) is one example (http://www.netlibrary.com). As with traditional ‘p-books’, e-books cover a range of types including monographs, textbooks, reference works, manuals, handbooks, directories as well as children’s and adult fiction. Out-of-print books can be digitised and then made available as an e-book.

There are many stakeholders involved in the e-book market including:

- Users
- Library and information professionals
- Publishers
- Aggregators – such as netLibrary
- Software and hardware providers
- Authors

During this workshop we will be sharing experiences and:

- Discussing what exactly IS an e-book – there have been various definitions over the years!
- Exploring a range of e-books from different suppliers
- Determining the advantages and disadvantages of e-books for users
- Investigating the challenges and opportunities for library and information professionals in providing access to, and promoting the use of, e-books.

Reports from studies in the UK undertaken for the Joint Information Services Committee Working Group on E-books will be given as well as information on work underway for Unesco in India on e-books.
Background reading: