SNOMED CT ® UK Edition

Consultation on the Transition to the BETA Format and Clinical Release frequency (2021 onwards)

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Contents

Background

'The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated NHS Digital, in its role as the UK National Release Centre for SNOMED CT®, to provide a more rapid and responsive service beyond our historic six-monthly terminology release cycle to represent COVID-19 related concepts so that all systems were able to make these standardised terms available for clinical staff to select the relevant COVID-19 term in the patient record.

NHS Digital undertook a consultation from 11 August 2020 to 25 September 2020 proposing a change to the frequency of our SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition for 2020 and future years'

The aim of this consultation was to:

- determine the future release frequency of the SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition

- seek feedback from users on the SNOMED CT UK Edition BETA format

- find ways to support users to adopt the BETA format

See Appendix 5 for details of the SNOMED CT products referred to in this document.

Release Frequency

We proposed a permanent shift to a minimum of seven scheduled releases of the SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition annually, made up of:

- two major releases annually in September/October and March, to update SNOMED CT UK Edition with the latest International Edition data

- five minor releases of SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition compromising of only incremental updates and other additions to UK clinical content

Unlike the 2020 "micro releases", future minor releases will not be restricted to urgent COVID-19 related content only. Instead, all UK-specific "business as usual" content that was previously released in two batches (April and October) will become distributed more or less equally across the full set of seven or more annual releases, both major and minor.

The SNOMED CT UK Drug Extension four-weekly release cycle will remain unchanged: each release of SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition will always co-occur with a scheduled release of the Drug Extension.

Should the clinical need arise, this typical schedule of seven releases between April and March may exceptionally be supplemented by one or more additional unscheduled emergency releases; these would however also occur on the same date as the next scheduled release of the UK Drug Extension.

The proposed continuing release schedule is therefore fundamentally based on the underlying 4-weekly cycle time of the SNOMED CT UK Drug Extension.

Planned changes to the SNOMED CT UK Edition release subfolder structure

From the first scheduled release in 2021/22 (19 May 2021), all Production releases of SNOMED CT UK Clinical and Drug Extensions will adopt the Beta encoding structure. All releases of both UK Clinical and UK Drug Extensions will continue to be published in parallel in both the older Legacy encoding as well as in the new Production encoding, but only until the end of March 2021 after which the Legacy encoding will be permanently withdrawn.

For a more detailed explanation of the motivations for the Beta bundling, see the webinar recording at this location. Detailed information is also provided in the SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition Technical overview document, section 2.4.1 and 2.4.2.

Throughout the remainder of 2020/21, Production releases will remain as before but with the same content always co-published on the Technology Reference data Update Distribution (TRUD) platform in Beta format, as Test Releases.
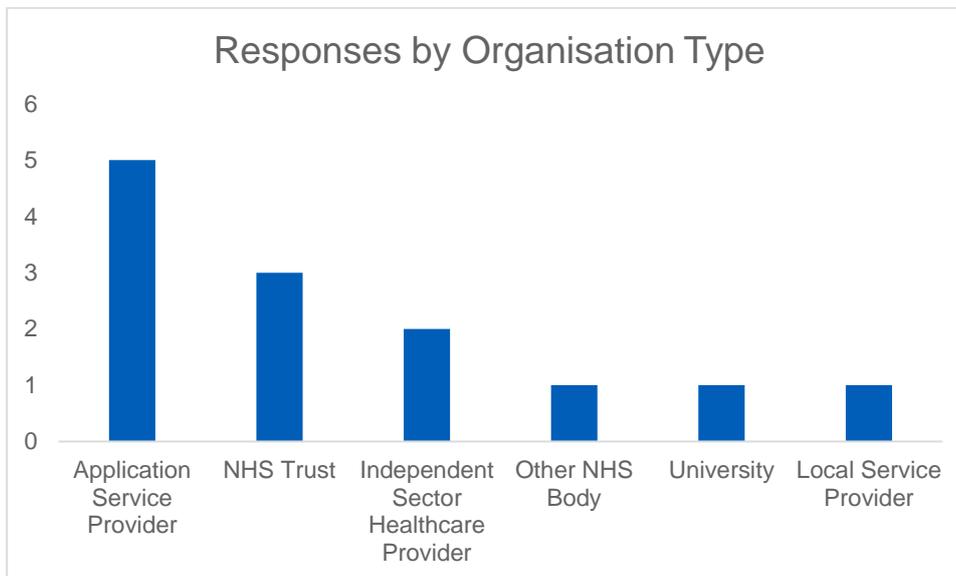
Results

The consultation ran from the period of 12 August 2020 to 25 September 2020 including an additional two-week extension.

We promoted the consultation through direct e-mail to Request Submission Portal users and TRUD subscribers,' articles were also published on the Delen collaboration website and included in the fortnightly COVID-19 Information Standards SNAP update.
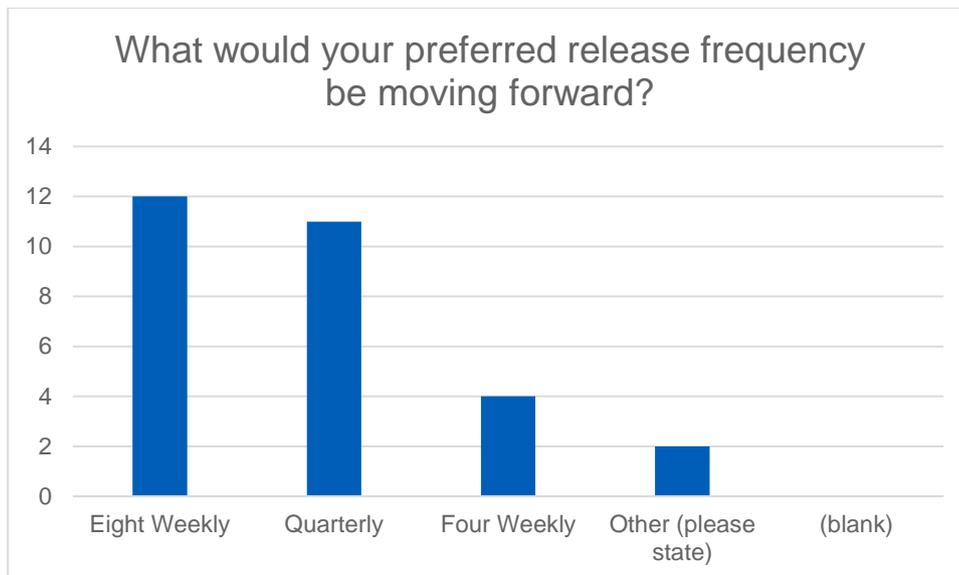
Respondents

Overall, there were twenty-eight responses to the consultation. The Organisation Type and contact details were non-essential fields which resulted in 16 respondents not declaring their organisations. For those people with stated organisation the most common was Application Service Provider followed by independent healthcare provider and NHS Trust.

Release Frequency

Question 1: What would your preferred release frequency be moving forward?

All 28 respondents stated a preference in this question. Twelve people stated a preference for releases every eight weeks (43%), eleven people stated preferences for quarterly (38%) and three people stated releases every four weeks (11%). Out of the two people who stated 'other' there was one person who wanted real time releases and one person that did not state a specific timescale. No-one stated a preference for the current six-monthly release cycle,

What would your preferred release frequency be moving forward?

Decision

There will be seven releases of the SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition in 2021, this will encompass two major releases in May and December and five minor releases which will be scheduled for the following dates:

2020/21

- 27 January 2021

- 24 March 2021

2021/22

- 19 May 2021 (Major Release includes International Edition data)

- 14 July 2021

- 11 August 2021

- 6 October 2021

- 1 December 2021 (Major Release includes International Edition data)

- 26 January 2022

- 23 March 2022

If the situation dictates there might be minor additional releases in response to urgent content change requests however we will seek to keep these to a minimum and will scheduled in line with the release of the SNOMED CT UK Drug Extension.

We will review the 2022/23 release schedule in the middle of 2021.

We will seek to keep users informed with respects to the release schedule through our release communications and Delen.

Comments and Response

Will other content be kept in sync with more frequent releases, maps to classifications, QOF etc

We will endeavour to update all SNOMED CT UK Edition content (including SNOMED CT refsets and classification cross-maps) with each release. However, when large updates to content occur it might not be possible to fully update SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition Refsets and Cross Maps for the same release; comprehensive updates to these derivative products would therefore follow only in later releases. We seek to keep these events to a minimum.

Artefacts using SNOMED CT out of the jurisdiction of Terminology and Classifications Delivery Service such as Datasets and the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) will be updated in accordance with the business needs of that area.

The work associated with major release of SNOMED CT is significant and unpredictable, especially where hierarchical shifts take place

Five out of the seven releases in 2021/22 will be relatively small and only include changes to UK based content. There is a need to maintain this frequency to ensure that terms are available for the accurate representation of COVID-19 in line with the national response and to ensure we can quickly respond and deploy to other non-COVID-19 Requests. Large scale changes will only take place twice a year when we synchronise the SNOMED CT UK Edition with the SNOMED CT International Edition.

NHS Drug data is published in the last three days of each CALENDAR month. The 4 or 8 weekly schedule does not align with this leading to delays in processing coding data as the drug data takes priority. Our preference is for a regular date not one that moves from the beginning to the end of the month.

Moving the SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition to eight weekly is required to ensure a deeper level of technical alignment exists with the four weekly SNOMED CT UK Drug Extension and weekly dm+d content. Our remit is to ensure alignment and data consistency between terminology releases.

Keeping up to date with the changes is hard enough with current updates - agree it needs to be more frequent, but not this frequent.

We advise users that with respects to the SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition they should be no more than six months behind the latest release. However, it is imperative that anyone deploying SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition should be aware of the clinical risks associated with not deploying an update.

Users of the SNOMED CT UK Drug Extension should be no further than eight weeks behind in line with the terms set out in the Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) and (GP Systems of Choice (GPSOC) contract.

More frequent changes to the SNOMED CT to Classification Cross Maps could impact trust data quality

In-year updates to classifications cross-maps mostly occur when new SNOMED CT concepts are added that fall within scope of the classifications. The cross-maps are to pre-existing classification codes unless this occurs when the classifications are updated every three years.

We do not believe the level of changes should disrupt clinical coding in Secondary Care and in fact would allow us to better drip feed improvements as and when we make them.
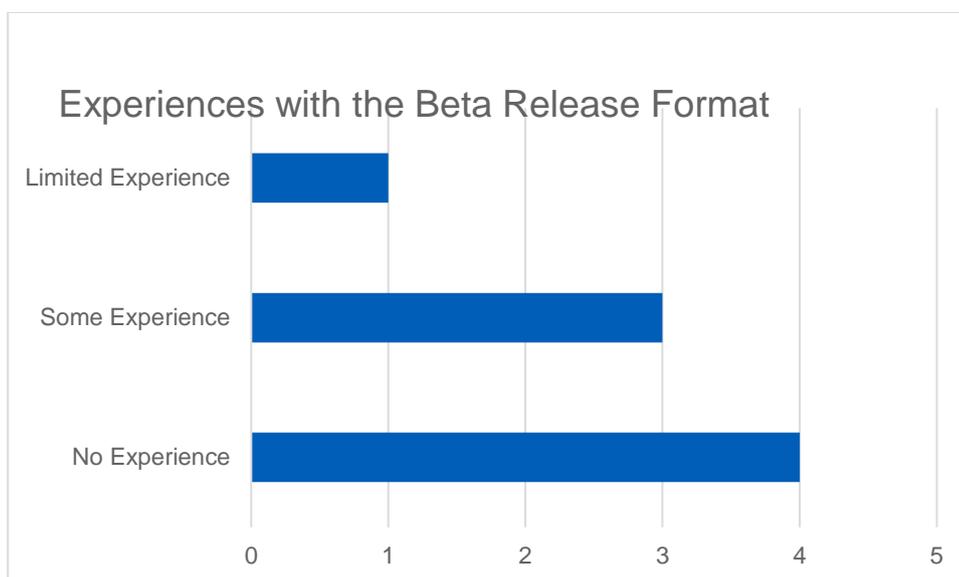
Large scale changes to SNOMED CT content will take place on a biannual basis when we incorporate the SNOMED CT International Edition into the UK Edition.

We need immediate real-time releases. The idea of a release cycles belongs with paper. There is no technical reason as far as I know why, once a code has been approved it should not be instantly available.

We currently do not have the associated technology or platforms to support real time delivery of new terminology codes. In the future we will assess the costs and benefits that such a platform change would entail.

Beta Release format

Question 3 : If possible, please provide any feedback on your experience with the BETA format packaging for...
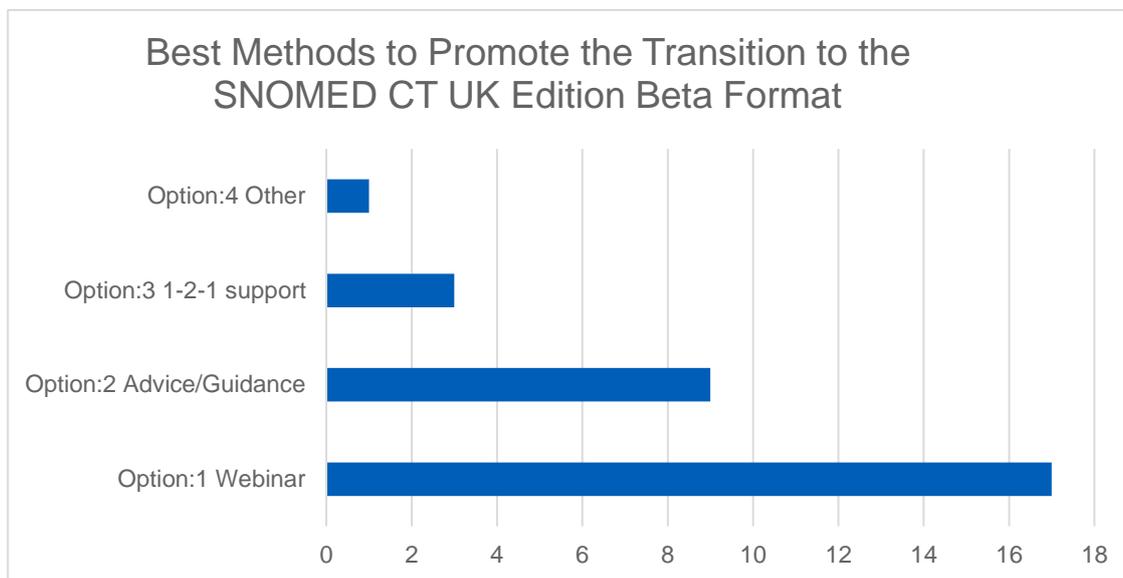

With respects to the Beta Release Format there was roughly a 50:50 split between those who had experience with the format and those that did not.

For those who had experience several issues were raised as per below

- Not all refsets are in this release, some are on a SharePoint site which we have issues accessing

- We would prefer NHSD to pre-merge all the content, so we receive one concept file, one description file, one relationship file (as per US NRC)

- Works well in a sophisticated scripted import environment. Makes more casual imports using Wizards and selecting individual files even more inadvisable - arguably a good thing.

For full comments please see Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

Questions 5-8: Is there anything we can do to assist with your implementation of SNOMED CT

The preferred methods for assisting users to transition to the Beta release format are the use of Webinar (seventeen responses) and additional advice and guidance (nine). Three people stated a preference for direct support and guidance.

BETA Release Format: Decision and Approach

The SNOMED CT UK Edition (Clinical Edition and Drug Extension) releases will switch to being the current BETA permutation from the 19 May 2021 release.

The current SNOMED CT UK Edition Production format will be available as a Legacy bundling only for the following releases

- 19 May 2021 (Clinical and Drugs)

- 16 June 2021 (Drugs)

- 14 July 2021 (Clinical and Drugs)

The SNOMED CT UK Edition release will be available in both release bundling formats up to and including the 14 July 2021 release.

We will seek to promote the webinar detailing the Beta format within our release communications and on our Delen site and provide additional guidance to users on Delen.

If anyone needs direct support, they can contact our helpdesk on information.standards@nhs.net

Comments on the Beta Release format

Works well in a sophisticated scripted import environment. Makes more casual imports using Wizards and selecting individual files even more inadvisable - arguably a good thing.

Whilst we welcome the data quality improvements which have arisen, we will work to ensure appropriate guidance is in place for all implementers.

The launch of the new Terminology Server in early 2021 should help those who do not have a sophisticated import environment. Information on this service can be found on the NHS Digital Website.

Consolidated release (as per USA edition) might be considered.

We have no plans for a consolidated SNOMED CT UK Edition release as the Clinical and Drug extensions will continue to be on different schedules. If a decision in the future is made to place them on the same schedule, then we will seek to engage with stakeholders as and when we are ready.

Not all Refsets are in this release, some are on a SharePoint site which we have issues accessing

All official SNOMED CT UK Clinical Editions are in the beta format. The production, maintenance, and distribution of refsets not in the SNOMED CT UK Edition is at the discretion of their owners.

Question 9: Other Comments

My concern is that all communication is clear. Have you asked for any feedback on your standard communications?

Over the last twelve months we have worked on improving the clarity of our communications, through migration of the Release notes to the SNOMED CT: Important Notices & Known Issues on Delen. The Release Documentation is also on the SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition Release Documentation on Delen. We will take actions to both investigate and improve how we communicate changes to the release.

Improved release notes with changes and additions

The Release Documentation is available on Delen. In recent months we have simplified the release e-mails and have directing users to comprehensive release notes on the SNOMED CT: Important Notices & Known Issues page on Delen. So far, we have notified users of SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition concept additions. In upcoming releases, we will seek to also add mapping and refset changes.

We also appreciate that a largest impact of changes is because of the deployment of the SNOMED CT International Edition. To help users understand upcoming change we will include links to the following SNOMED International Resources

> The Daily Build Report within the SNOMED International Browser

> SNOMED International: Early Visibility Release Notices.

There is a good deal of work ongoing with COVID-19 research. Research groups are looking to develop COVID-19 Risk calculators. Its important these groups are aware of the system cycle deployment.

We continue to release new COVID-19 content but any new requests for new SNOMED CT UK content must be placed through the Request Submission Portal. Once these requests have been processed, they will be published with respects to the schedule published in the decision section of this report.

Once the codes have been released with the SNOMED CT UK Edition their subsequent deployment within clinical systems is the responsibility of your system supplier.

A webinar to facilitate the use of the SNOMED CT Browser should be on the website, and not just for new versions, but for any user interested in finding a code in the browser

> There are resources on how to use the SNOMED CT Browser on Delen.
>
> Some guidance surrounding the use of the browser in finding mental health content is available on Delen. We have this video on Delen with respects to how to use the browser.

Align so all the data is in one place

> All SNOMED CT UK Edition data is available to download via our distribution platform (TRUD). We are aware that there are other providers of SNOMED CT derived products including refsets and their publication schedules are different from ours. We expect this market to grow but at this moment the Terminology and Classifications Delivery Service is unable to be the central distributer of all SNOMED CT derivative content in the UK.

Appendix 1: Please state your reasons for your preferred choice (Release cycle)

- This will ensure any clinical changes to terminology are regularly updated and make changes easier to manage in smaller more frequent changes

- NHS Drug data is published in the last three days of each CALENDAR month. The 4 or 8 weekly schedules does not align with this leading to delays in processing coding data as the drug data takes priority. Our preference is for a regular date not one that moves from the beginning to the end of the month.

- In agreement with the proposed release cycle

- I think it is a equilibrated frequency

- Keeping up to date with the changes is hard enough with current updates - agree it needs to be more frequent, but not this frequent.

- Provides consistency

- Will support uptake of the SNOMED CT standard and it's use in secondary use data sets

- If new coding is needed it is better that it can be made available quicker in clinical systems to prevent the system suppliers using local codes which may not potentially map to a national code at a later date

- SNOMED-CT does not cover yet all information that could be coded

- Think that this will be a good date that people will remember

- Fair balance between frequency of release and resources required to assimilate content. 4 weekly too vulnerable to impacts staff absences from holidays etc.

- Gives more time for implementation. I am concerned that ICD/OPCS maps will change too quickly if the frequency is increased. This could impact on Trust data quality and finances

- As stated above. Current release cycles are dysfunctional.

- RCPCH has formed a working group to develop a library of SNOMEDCT based terms but my involvement has confirmed my suspicion that this manual process is not sustainable or reproducible over the full range of healthcare without a fundamental rethink of the purpose, implementation and nature of clinical coding.

- Updating an EPR system every 8 weeks to capture SNOMED updates is a large resource commitment.

- There is a real tension between keeping up to date and providing the codes required and maintaining the templates and audits used in clinical systems. For each update these tools all need to be reviewed to see if there are implications which can be quite marked and unpredictable, especially where hierarchical shifts take place.

- Smaller releases are preferable. Aligning with drug releases makes sense

- 8 weekly should be manageable, as long as we can synchronise with the Terminology server

- It is a balance between being so frequent that there is not time to process changes resulting from the update, e.g. subset reviews, template reviews, rules review etc and the need to get new content into the community for use.

- Happy to conform to NHSD preferred schedule. Same amount of work to do but can be scheduled over longer period (compared to 2x per year)

- It helps to have more frequent updates where new coding is required e.g. COVID but also requests that might impact local service delivery e.g. where a new code has been requested. Quarterly is a standard frequency that is easy to remember.

Appendix 2: If possible, please provide any feedback on your experience with the BETA format packaging for...

- Not all Refsets are in this release, some are on a SharePoint site which we have issues accessing

- I only download the description file for information about new terms being released

- No experience of it

- Lost access, so not checked yet.

- Works well in a sophisticated scripted import environment. Makes more casual imports using Wizards and selecting individual files even more inadvisable - arguably a good thing.

- No direct experience

- No experience

- No experience

- We would prefer NHSD to pre-merge all the content so we receive one concept file, one description file, one relationship file (as per US NRC)

- I have not personally dealt with this directly since in my team we manage data extraction directly from GP systems using EMIS Enterprise. Other colleagues working with our data warehouse probably have more experience of this.

Appendix 3: Comments from option 4 (Communication of Beta Format)

- A webinar to facilitate the use of the SNOMED browser should be in the website, and not just for new versions, but for any user interested in finding a code in the browser

- Consolidated release (as per USA edition) might be considered.

Appendix 4: Other Comments

Communications

- My concern is that all communication is clear. Have you asked for any feedback on your standard communications?

- Improved release notes with changes and additions

- Pre-release notes for planning"

Files

- Align so all the data is in one place

- What will the arrangements be for ensuring that associated refsets are updated alongside the release of new content please

- FHIR API synchronisation

- We need to be aware and have input into the international changes as these can have significant impacts on UK primary care.

Release Frequency

- I strongly support daily releases. The change to RF2 was significant. I have seen the slides but do not really understand what is proposed.

- Is there a timescale that system suppliers are given to add new released coding updates into their systems? Sometimes it can be a few weeks before they appear, however, (it has been quicker during COVID) . From experience I am referring to the bi- annual releases.

Other

- Will other content be kept in synch with more frequent releases, maps to classifications, QOF etc

- Well done over past 6 months especially. Thank you.

Content Requests

- I have not suggested new codes for quite some time, lost my logging, not my interest, and lately to busy but it should be encouraged, clinicians accessing the browser should be able to join in, with the nhs.mail as a way of confirming ID, ... so the nomenclature improves more quickly.

- There is a good deal of work ongoing with Covid research. Research groups are looking to develop Covid Risk calculators. Its important these groups are aware of the system cycle deployment.

Appendix 5: SNOMED CT product releases

SNOMED CT UK Edition	This edition includes all releases of SNOMED CT: • SNOMED CT International Edition • SNOMED CT UK Clinical Extension • SNOMED CT UK Drug Extension
SNOMED CT UK Clinical Edition	This includes international and clinical: • SNOMED CT International Edition • SNOMED CT UK Clinical Extension.
SNOMED CT UK Extension	The UK extension includes all releases that have been made for the UK Extension: • SNOMED CT UK Clinical Extension • SNOMED CT UK Drug Extension
SNOMED CT UK Clinical Extension	The clinical extension is a set of terminology components and reference set members that add to and are dependent on the SNOMED CT International Edition
SNOMED CT UK Drug Extension	The drug extension is a set of terminology components and reference set members that add to and are dependent on the SNOMED CT International Edition