Level(s) is a voluntary reporting framework to assess the sustainability of buildings. Using existing standards, Level(s) provides a common EU approach to the assessment of environmental performance in the built environment. On the 4 December, 50 pioneering organisations will join the European Commission at a workshop to learn more about the testing phase for Level(s).

This report aims to equip workshop participants with key information ahead of the testing workshop and presents participants with points for consideration against each agenda point.

Level(s) – delivering global change one building at a time

Buildings have a key role to play in tackling global issues such as resource scarcity and sustainable development. Level(s) is a vital toolkit that will enable construction professionals to unlock this potential by addressing sustainability aspects of a building that are linked to global and regional priorities such as the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement and Europe’s Circular Economy goals.

The SDGs will lead to a major shift in the way global forces balance the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. In parallel, the adoption of the Paris Agreement will test the ability of society, government and businesses to work together to keep global temperature rise below 2 degrees.

Supporting these global goals, Europe has set ambitious energy and climate targets for 2030 and 2050. However, unless the vast potential in the buildings sector is exploited, these goals remain unachievable. Sustainable buildings can and must be used as a catalyst to deliver environmental, social and economic benefits.

The European Commission formally recognised the potential in the building sector in the Circular Economy Action plan which identified the need for core indicators for the assessment of the lifecycle environmental performance of a building.

This recommendation led to the development of Level(s) which will set the strategic direction for sustainable buildings in Europe by linking action taken at a building-level to overarching societal and global priorities.
Market Leaders see the opportunity in Level(s)

Market leaders with an eye on long-term trends know that meeting these global goals require systemic change – business as usual is not an option. They see the opportunities, not challenges, presented by the circular economy and see Level(s) as a first step in futureproofing the buildings sector.

Level(s) is particularly welcome by market leaders who have long been asking for an EU policy that looks beyond just energy, and sets out a clear common language for sustainable building performance, focusing on a limited number of core sustainability indicators. By incorporating lifecycle emissions, resource and water efficiency, health and wellbeing, resilience and cost, Level(s) will provide users with key insights into performance related aspects of their buildings.

Leading Governments and municipalities see Level(s) as a key tool that will enable them to incorporate the concept of circular economy into national plans, whilst ensuring they are aligned with European efforts to tackle climate change.

The testing phase provides market leaders with the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership, and to get ahead of competitors on a key new trend in European sustainable building.

Certification tools welcome Level(s) harmonised approach

Certification bodies are welcoming Level(s) as it offers a voluntary reporting framework with indicators based on existing reference standards that enables comparison across national boundaries whilst laying the foundation for a common approach based on lifecycle and circular thinking.

By incorporating Level(s) within their criteria, building assessment schemes, investor reporting schemes and public policy instruments are assured that their building designs are aligned with common EU policy objectives and global goals.

Bodies who administer leading certification tools across Europe are already beginning to address how they can align and integrate Level(s) into their building certification schemes in the short, medium and long-term.

Ahead of the session on Market Leaders, please consider the following:

- How might Level(s) be welcomed in your market?
- What barriers to implementation might exist?
- Should the link between Level(s) and the Sustainable Development Goals be made more explicit?
- How can market leaders encourage their supply chain to promote Level(s)?
- What roles could policy-makers play to support Level(s) testing and implementation?

Ahead of the session on certification, please consider the following:

- What is the potential opportunity in aligning certification schemes with Level(s)?
- How can certification schemes make it easy to fulfil a Level(s) assessment?
- How can we communicate that regulation = standard practice, Level(s) = better practice, certification tools = best practice, in terms of sustainable building assessment?
Testing Level(s)

On 23rd August 2017, the European Commission published a webpage which contains guidance on how to make a performance assessment using Level(s). The Commission is now inviting companies, associations and public authorities to participate in a two-year testing phase to help shaping Level(s) and to ensure that the final reporting tool is ready for the mass market.

During the testing phase, the robustness and user-friendliness of the indicators and guidance will be analysed. The testing phase will also address any unforeseen challenges and gain a better understanding of support measures, e.g. technical tools or policy initiatives, that are needed to help Level(s) underpinning major growth in sustainable building practice across Europe.

Who can use Level(s) and what type of projects are most suitable?

The Level(s) framework is designed to be used by construction professionals involved in the decision making process during a building’s development, providing them with a common approach to assessing the sustainability of their buildings.

Such actors include property owners, developers and investors, design teams, construction product manufacturer, managers and contractors, property agents and valuers. These include both public and private clients and managers of building projects. Tailored guidance for each target group is provided in the guidance.

Level(s) can be used on both office and residential buildings and is applicable on either a new construction or a major renovation.

Stakeholders interested in testing Level(s) can test the framework on three types of projects:
- Projects in their infancy or about to start
- Projects that are ongoing
- Finalised projects that have sufficient data with which to test the various indicators

How might Level(s) work and what support will be provided during the testing phase?

Those users who wish to test Level(s) must follow the guidance and reporting formats that were provided by the European Commission in Part 3 of the guidance published in August 2017. This sets out the key steps that users will need to undertake to complete a Level(s) performance assessment.

The Joint Research Centre (JRC) will provide users with technical assistance and guidance throughout the testing period. This will be provided via a helpdesk where JRC employees will answer key questions regarding use of the framework, the reporting template and other issues that may arise for testers during the testing phase.

Ahead of the session on testing, please consider the following:

- Who would be involved in the testing of Level(s)?
- What support would you need from the Commission?
- What tools can assist with calculations and reporting?
- What type of guidance might your specific stakeholder group need?
- What type of projects would you like to test Level(s) on?

Analysing Level(s)

The objective for the workshop is to equip those interested in testing Level(s) with all the necessary information to ensure a successful testing phase. Further, these sessions will provide us with key insight into the challenges and opportunities faced by those organisations testing Level(s).
Breakout Group One – Preparedness for Level(s) across Europe

Level(s) is mainly built on existing standards and it references many well approved methods. This breakout group will explore the readiness of different European countries for a successful roll-out of the Level(s) indicators into the markets from practitioners’ perspectives. The goal is to identify preparedness and gaps in countries / regions with regards to a widespread application of the reporting tool. Questions to be discussed include:

- How accepted and ready are the different indicators, methods and underlying data in different countries?
- What is needed to fill potential gaps?
- What role can Green Building Councils and certification schemes play to encourage the use of Level(s)?

Breakout Group Two – How to mainstream Green Buildings – the role of the Level(s) testing phase?

In this session, participants will explore the opportunities and challenges presented by Level(s). Questions that will be discussed include:

- Why are you interested in testing Level(s)?
- What do you think is the potential of Level(s)?
- What might make it difficult to achieve this potential?
- Do you see any barriers to testing Level(s)?

Breakout Group Three – Level(s) and the Public Sector

The support of the public sector will be critical in ensuring that Level(s) is used by the stakeholders of the building sector. This session will explore the role the public sector can play in mainstreaming Level(s). Questions that will be discussed include:

- How could Level(s) raise the impact of policies, action plans and regulations?
- Should the Level(s) indicators be incorporated into GPP across Europe?
- Should EU structural funds make use of Level(s) in their funding criteria?

Who to contact

For further information on the testing phase, please visit the dedicated webpage for Level(s) on DG Environment’s website http://ec.europa.eu/environment/eussd/buildings.htm