



Net zero: How BS ISO 20121 can embed sustainability

Villa Wolkonsky in Rome is the official residence of the British Ambassador to Italy. It hosts around 100 events a year, with an average of 3,000 guests.

To minimize the environmental impact of these events, and demonstrate sustainability leadership, the British Embassy in Rome set out to attain ISO 20121: Sustainable Event Management.

Inspired by the UK COP26 presidency in 2021, the British Embassy decided to lead by example by bringing in sustainable event management practices. To achieve this, it chose to attain ISO 20121 because it is an internationally-recognized standard.

The Embassy has seen tangible gains in the form of cost savings, increased energy efficiency, greater employee motivation, and reputational benefits. It has switched from fossil fuels to 100% renewable energy, improved its water resource management, introduced zero-emission gardening equipment, and increased the number of staff walking to work or getting there by bike, public transport or electric mobility.

Being certified to BSI ISO 20121 has enabled the Embassy to protect the environment, demonstrate leadership, and share best practices across the global Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) network.



Find out more: [bsigroup.com](https://www.bsigroup.com)



“The British Ambassador’s residence in Rome hosts events for thousands of people every year. I am delighted that our commitment to sustainable events has been recognized with ISO 20121 certification, demonstrating how the Foreign Office is delivering on our commitment to sustainability and net zero.”

The Rt Hon Edward Llewellyn OBE,
Her Majesty’s Ambassador to the
Italian Republic and Non-Resident
Ambassador to San Marino



Client challenge

The events held at Villa Wolkonsky have clear diplomatic, cultural, educational and social benefits. However, the organization of any event can generate considerable waste and have other negative impacts that can last for years.

The Embassy’s objectives were to improve water resource management, energy efficiency, sustainable transport, waste management, own food production and supply, and health and well-being. A major challenge was to get a consensus among the Villa’s staff on the need for a cultural change towards sustainability.

BSI solution

To overcome the difficulty of getting staff consensus, staff were voluntarily involved in the event planning

cycle and their success stories were highlighted. This inspired and motivated staff, and created a culture of sustainability knowledge-sharing.

The Villa’s staff took stock of sustainable practices already in force; identified areas for improvement and new opportunities; and used a 46-objective project tracker over four months to work towards ISO 20121 certification.

BSI ISO 20121 has introduced the staff to new ideas and concepts, and enabled them to think long-term (especially where the objective could involve a sizeable initial financial investment). It has also helped them understand the certification’s significance in the wider embassy objective – setting a net zero target. They are now highly focused on the method of production, origin and circularity of products used in events.



Why BSI?

The British Embassy in Rome has gained: significant cost savings; more teamwork and employee motivation; improved communication on sustainability with suppliers and clients; an enhanced reputation within the FCDO and with internal and Italian stakeholders.