International Summer School for Teens plays host to over 200 students each summer in Stirling, offering a vast range of academic and vocational opportunities. With a wealth of experience in the international education sector, informed by spending her school years in five different countries, Carey Rowe founded ISSFT in 2014. Carey tells The Parliamentary Review how the ISSFT team aim to empower young people and provide them with a range of skills that will allow them to pursue exciting careers in the future.

We founded International Summer School for Teens in order to offer students from across the globe the opportunity to learn and develop friendships over a three-week programme. As a child, I attended an international school in Kenya, among other places, and the experience left me with a passion for international education. The summer schools are now based at Stirling University and aim to empower young people while providing them with real life skills.

How it works

Our students come from around the world, with a number of them arriving from the EU, Asia, Russia, Africa, Middle East and the Americas. The course provides them with an opportunity to develop skills, build new relationships and remain productive over the summer, offering them access to world-class sports facilities, places of cultural significance and renowned universities throughout Scotland. All students enrolled in the course have to attend for the entire programme, in order to fulfil the tailored curriculum. Similarly, we will try to ensure that there is a diverse
range of nationalities present in order to avoid cliques between students who share a language. Integration is a vital aspect of our school and we want all students to embrace this.

Every day, our students complete an academic class in the morning and an elective class in the afternoon. Our academic options are English, Study Skills, Global Entrepreneurship, Introduction to Law and Environmental Science, while our elective options are Golf, Tennis, Computer Coding, Theatre, Sports Leadership and Photography. Our golfers have played Gleneagles and the Old Course at St Andrews, and our tennis players train at the National Tennis Centre. The coding class is pioneering with a specific focus on encouraging young women into the field, and our entrepreneurship classes give students the resources to start their own businesses. The school provides a genuine learning experience and offers opportunities to visit world-leading institutions and locations.

Developing a high-quality service

We both have an international commercial background, working in cross-border headhunting and marketing. This experience gave us a sophisticated understanding of the demands of the foreign market and we combined this with our genuine passion for education and development. We want our service to help potential future leaders build a unique range of skills and gain experience in co-operating with their peers from around the world.

Our classes are very forward-thinking and have a clear focus on environmental issues and technological advances. Young people are tech savvy but are also passionate about protecting the environment in a way that perhaps older generations aren’t. As a result, we have tailored our classes to deal with these issues on a global scale. Our ambition is to develop a group of young people who are aspirational and aim to become future leaders.

Our international clientele is incredibly diverse. To respond to their demands, we have taken time to build relationships in order to understand how we can offer a service that caters for a wide range of motivations. We communicate openly with the families and our students, taking their feedback on board and then tailoring our service to meet group and individual passions. To ensure our service evolves and improves year on year, we invest in our staff, looking for intelligent, hungry university students and graduates.
to support our programmes. We offer them specialised training and help them develop careers after they leave us.

Our growth has been organic and largely based on referrals. We have numerous returning students every summer and welcome siblings of students from previous years, and we are already taking bookings for 2019. We find space for any student on the programme, regardless of their academic background, and our diverse offerings mean all our students can find something they excel at. Provided they speak a basic level of English, which is necessary to allow them to fully engage with the programme, we work on a first come, first served basis.

Challenges and the future

Brexit could have an impact on our service, with the extent of such an impact being determined by the outcome of negotiations. The uncertainty surrounding the process has caused some difficulties, but we are confident that our year-on-year growth in student numbers shows we have been able to weather these potential issues. The way international students view the UK is a concern, but it retains a world-leading reputation for education, to which we offer unique access. Scottish Independence was a similar concern, but our international and European outlook still resonates with our clients.

Our strapline is that we are “proud to do things differently”. We are innovative, forward thinking and passionate about the progression of our students. We continually reinvest in our service and we recruit bright, ambitious young people who help make our schools what they are. As we look to the future, we will monitor the outcome of Brexit carefully and we will assess our options with regards to expanding into Europe. We remain optimistic, however, and we are excited to offer more students a life-changing learning experience.

“We are innovative, forward thinking and passionate about the progression of our students.”