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SCAR Secretariat Report

Report Author(s)

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Summary

The SCAR Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day running of SCAR's operations and acts as a hub for information, discussion and enquiries from the SCAR community and beyond. This report focuses on internal administrative issues and on the result of an internal audit carried out in 2022 to review secretariat functions. The review concluded that even though the Secretariat had been under considerable stress since the pandemic, it had maintained a high level of service to the SCAR community whilst also maintaining financial and organisational probity. Recommendations for the future focussed mostly on personnel issues but also covered staff remuneration, support to volunteers (including Trustees) and continuing professional development (CPD).

Recommendations

ExCom to continue to work with the ED and Secretariat to set priorities, budget and timeline for progressing the recommendations of the internal audit report, in parallel with a review of the risk register.

Staffing Situation

The Secretariat is currently staffed as follows:

- Executive Director (ED), Chandrika Nath, currently part-time due to long term health issues.
- Executive Officer (EO), Eoghan Griffin, full time
- Project Officer (PO), Johanna Grabow, full time since 2022
- Administrative Officer (AO), transitioning from Hayley Westlake to Angharad Downes (full time)

The SCAR community recently said farewell to Rosemary Nash who retired on 6th September. Rosemary has been SCAR's administrative assistant since 2007 and has made an enormous contribution to the Antarctic research community during her time at SCAR. She will be greatly missed. Rosemary's replacement, Hayley Westlake, will be taking maternity leave from 16th October 2023 and will be replaced by Angharad Downes. We wish Hayley all the best and welcome Angharad.

Work is underway to recruit an additional full time Science and Operations Officer (for 12 months in the first instance) at the Secretariat to address resourcing issues arising from various factors, including the reduced hours of the Executive Director, increasing workload, and the recent staffing transitions.

The Secretariat is hosted by the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) in Cambridge and enjoys an excellent relationship with the SPRI community. Secretariat staff have transitioned to hybrid working arrangements since the pandemic and spend 40% or more of their time working from SPRI.

Secretariat activities

The SCAR Secretariat is responsible for the day-to-day running of SCAR's operations and acts as a hub for information, discussion and enquiries from the SCAR community and beyond. The Secretariat supports a wide range of SCAR functions including support to SCAR groups, organising meetings and events, supporting SCAR's provision of policy advice, supporting SCAR's capacity-building work, supporting outreach and communications and maintaining SCAR's website as well as supporting the work of the Executive Committee as required. This work is detailed in other papers as indicated and so will not be repeated here.

The Secretariat also supports the administration of SCAR's internal processes such as finance, information management and other back-office tasks.

The ED maintains oversight of personnel, regulatory and compliance issues, supported by the EO. This is the focus of the next section.

Internal Audit 2022 and Follow Up

The Secretariat has no in-house support to assist it with HR, regulatory and compliance matters. The ED obtains support from external consultants as required. To ensure that the Secretariat is functioning smoothly, an internal audit of secretariat functions was carried out in late 2022. This was intended as a follow up to the comprehensive internal audit of secretariat functions carried out in 2019 (see the [2019 Secretariat Report](#)). The team carrying out the audit were Claire Godward, Chief Executive of Relate in Cambridgeshire, and Bev Morris, Director of Marvellous Minds.

As in 2019, the review focussed on HR and finance processes and aimed to:

- Provide an external perspective on progress against actions agreed in 2019
- Establish where the Secretariat and Trustees felt that progress had or had not been made
- Identify any compliance issues that had become critical
- Identify any new compliance issues
- Give guidance on priorities for the next two years

All Secretariat staff, the VP Finance and the President were interviewed in addition to desktop review of relevant documents. The focus for the discussions was an assessment of progress since the 2019 audit and any current issues faced in fulfilling the Secretariat's role.

Findings of the internal audit

The internal audit concluded that while some progress had been made against the recommendations made in 2019, progress has been slowed by factors such as changes to working practices since the pandemic, changes in staffing levels, and change of membership of the Executive Committee (ExCom). It highlighted that even though the Secretariat had been under considerable stress, it had maintained a high level of service to the SCAR community whilst also maintaining financial and organisational probity. Recommendations for the future focussed mostly on personnel issues but also covered staff remuneration, support to volunteers (including Trustees) and continuing professional development (CPD). The review suggested that additional HR support would be required to implement and embed these recommendations without causing additional workload for the Secretariat. Marvellous minds were commissioned to assist with implementing the recommendations.

Key actions to date against the recommendations of the internal audit report include:

- The Secretariat has started a workflow analysis to identify resourcing gaps and pinch points in the 24 month cycle.
- The ED is undertaking a review of all job descriptions to ensure that they accurately reflect what is being undertaken and what is needed, both in terms of skills and activity.
- A recruitment process for the new Administrative Officer was completed, informed by the workflow analysis and the review of job descriptions. Rosemary Nash overlapped by several months with the new AO, in order to relieve some pressure on the Secretariat and help clear administrative backlogs.
- A recruitment process for a new Science and Operations Officer is underway; informed by the workflow analysis and review of job descriptions. This will be a 12 month position in the first instance.
- Marvellous Minds have conducted reviews of the staff appraisal system and the remuneration system. Their recommendations are under review by the Executive Committee.

Future Priorities

Follow up to 2022 internal audit

The ED will work closely with the Executive Committee to progress the outstanding recommendations of the 2022 audit, including:

- Review of the appraisal and remuneration system

- Reviewing the staff handbook to include new policies and statements as recommended by the internal audit report, including hybrid working, wellbeing and work-life balance. Establishing a named Data Protection Officer and Health and Safety Officer at the Secretariat.
- Drawing up codes of conduct and role descriptions for volunteers (including Trustees)
- Developing materials for induction and training of volunteers (including Trustees) as required.

Risk register

The 2022 financial audit identified the need for SCAR to review and update its risk register. In addition to consideration of financial risk this will include consideration of a range of other areas including internal controls and fraud.

Carbon reduction

The Executive Director is undertaking a review of actions undertaken by SCAR partner organisations relating to organisational carbon reduction. An informal working group will be convened over the coming months to provide a forum to discuss these issues with the wider SCAR community.

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