SCAR Secretariat Report

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Summary
The SCAR Secretariat now consists of four staff members, since the appointment of a new Executive Director in June 2018 and a Communications and Information Officer in December 2018.

A recent independent audit highlighted that the Secretariat was working well, pointing to strengths such as improved team spirit, job satisfaction and relationships with the Executive, pointing out that the excellent work now in train should be formally acknowledged and used as a platform for further development.

Over the past year work has been undertaken to improve the representation of SCAR groups on the SCAR website and build awareness of the work of SCAR groups through its newsletter and other outreach activities. The Secretariat has also supported SCAR’s input to the ATCM and other policy bodies through assisting with the coordination and preparation of papers, the ED’s attendance at the ATCM and participating in related events such as the SCAR/CEP protected areas workshop.

In 2019 the Secretariat’s hosting arrangement with Scott Polar Research Institute was secured for a further six years. Upcoming priorities include preparations for the Open Science Conference in 2020, plans for the transition of the Antarctic Environments Portal to SCAR in 2020 and further work to strengthen the internal functioning of the secretariat.

Areas for discussion include possible work on diversity and inclusion, environmental sustainability and work to boost donations from the public.
Secretariat Staff

The permanent Secretariat of SCAR consists of Chandrika Nath (SCAR Executive Director, 80% from June 2018 and full-time since January 2019), Eoghan Griffin (SCAR Executive Officer, full-time), Rosemary Nash (SCAR Administrative Officer, 60%) and since December 2019, Alice Oates (Communication and Information officer, 50%).

Hosting of the Secretariat

For more than 40 years, SCAR has enjoyed considerable benefits by having its Secretariat located within the Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI) at the University of Cambridge, in Cambridge, UK. These benefits include:

- generous office space - SPRI provides office space in the General Office for SCAR’s Administrative Officer, in exchange for some help to SPRI staff when needed. SPRI also provides two large offices for the other three staff, including provision of services (light, heating, internet etc).
- access to the administrative and technical support afforded by the Institute (e.g. IT support, server space).
- for Secretariat staff, access to many of benefits enjoyed by University staff (for example physical access to University colleges and facilities, access to the Eduroam wireless network, access to many journal databases and other online services, and a Cambridge University email account).

The intellectual interaction between SCAR and SPRI staff and scholars has proved highly valuable to both organisations. The arrangement has now been renewed for a further six years (double the term of the previous agreement), which provides the Secretariat with continuity and assists with forward planning.

Secretariat Activity

Since the 2018 SCAR Delegates meeting, the Secretariat has continued to support SCAR’s remit of facilitating high quality international research and providing objective and independent scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings and other organizations.

Support to SCAR groups and SCAR scientists is a priority for the Secretariat. Over the past year, work has been undertaken to improve the representation of SCAR groups on the SCAR website and build awareness of the work of SCAR groups through its newsletter and other activities [see separate papers on Communications (EC19 Paper 29) and on Policy (EC19 Paper 20)]. Guidance for new Programme Planning Groups was updated.

The ED has worked to build relationships with groups and group leaders, through 1-1 meetings or where practical through participating in meetings of SCAR groups. The Secretariat were also involved in the design of the structural review questionnaire and its promotion to the SCAR community and beyond.

All outstanding actions from the Polar 2018 meeting pertaining to the Secretariat have been completed. The Secretariat has managed logistical and other preparations for the 2019 Executive Committee meeting and are actively involved in planning for the 2020 Open Science Conference in Hobart, Tasmania (as discussed in EC19 Paper 11).
The Secretariat has also supported SCAR’s input to the ATCM and other policy bodies through assisting with the coordination and preparation of papers, the ED’s attendance at the ATCM and participating in related events such as the SCAR/CEP Protected Areas workshop.

The ED with the support of the Secretariat, has been involved with the 5-year review of the 2014 SCAR Horizon Scan which is currently underway, led by Emeritus Professor Mahlon C Kennicutt II.

The increase in staffing capacity since Polar 2018 has helped the Secretariat manage its day-to-day workload and, in addition, perform many valuable tasks for the community (such as administration for the recent SCAR/CEP Protected Areas workshop and ongoing administration of the SCAR-IAATO project and a variety of communications activities described in EC19 Paper 29).

**Partnerships**

The Secretariat supports SCAR in maintaining good links with external stakeholders in a variety of ways, including drawing up formal agreements, representing SCAR at key meetings and drawing up reports on SCAR’s activities for partners.

Over the past year a number of agreements with partners have been drawn up (or updated) including:

- A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between SCAR and the International Polar Heritage Committee (2019-2024) relating to collaboration on areas of mutual interest.
- A ‘Letter of Intent for Collaboration and Partnership’ between SCAR, Polar Educators International, the International Arctic Science Committee and the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists (2019-2021) aimed at updating the Polar Resource Book published during the last IPY.
- A Letter of agreement with the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) relating to funding of the SCAR-WMO Fellowship Scheme in 2019.

Work is underway to update agreements with the European Polar Board (EPB), the International Association of Cryospheric Sciences (IACS) and the International Permafrost Association (IPA).

The SCAR ED attended the annual meeting of the WMO’s Panel of Experts on Polar and High Mountain Observations, Research and Services (EC-PHORS) in Geneva to report on collaboration between WMO and SCAR. In addition, SCAR and WMO worked together on input to the UNFCCC climate change conference in Bonn.

The SCAR Secretariat have built good links with the Secretariat of the International Science Council and have coordinated SCAR community input into strategic reviews underway within the ISC. In January 2019, a meeting took place between the President of the ISC, Professor Daya Reddy, and the SCAR President.

**Improvements in internal processes**

Over the past year, a number of changes have been made within the Secretariat to improve internal communications and build team cohesion, for example:

- Use of task management software,
- Fortnightly team meetings,
- An annual teambuilding exercise,
An independent audit of Secretariat function by external consultants,
Major review and reorganisation of electronic information,
Reorganisation of office space and archive holdings.

In addition, regularly virtual meetings of the Executive Committee have taken place every 2 months, resulting in good communications between the Secretariat and ExCom.

The Staff Handbook drafted in 2018 has been completed, although further improvements were suggested by an independent audit conducted in 2019 (see below).

The transition to a new accountant (Days Accountants) to manage the Virtual Finance Office (VFO) has proven to be a success and has reduced the administrative burden on the Secretariat arising from the need to cross check financial processes extensively.

**Internal audit**

In April 2019, the ED commissioned a ‘light touch’ audit of the work of the Secretariat. Focusing primarily on HR and Finance, the aim was to identify any compliance issues or vulnerabilities, as well as to identify gaps in knowledge, skill or understanding within the Secretariat and to highlight strengths and weaknesses in the way the team is working. The audit consisted of 1-1 interviews with all Secretariat staff, further interviews with ExCom and examination of relevant paperwork.

The overall feedback of the audit was very positive:

*There is a sense of team spirit, trust and job satisfaction, with staff more able to talk openly and to identify how they would like to develop the role of the Secretariat in future. The introduction of a new Executive Director has had a significant impact on the way in which staff are managed and the relationships between the Secretariat and the Executive Committee.*

*The overall feedback is that the organisation is working well and is compliant with the critical legislation and working to the ethical standards expected of this type of organisation. There are areas for improvement as would be expected after a period without an Executive Director and with two relatively new staff in post. However, the organisation is clearly much more stable than it has been and the excellent work now in train should be formally acknowledged and used as a platform for further development.*

The audit made a range of recommendations across various aspects of the Secretariat’s management of HR and finance covering areas such as:

- Continuing Professional Development for staff,
- Further work to develop the appraisal system and staff recognition,
- Guidance and support to staff on health and wellbeing,
- Measures to increase resilience to change and to strengthen forward planning.

**Future priorities**

**Internal processes and follow up to internal audit**

In 2019, the Secretariat and Executive Committee will assess the recommendations made in the internal audit report, identify any to take forwards and develop a timeline for implementation. A number of further priorities have been identified:
- Further work to ensure GDPR compliance.
- Review of IT support (potentially with free assistance by the Charity IT Association). This will include identifying options to develop a contacts database.
- Completion of a set of internal guidance notes to assist with smooth handover processes within the Secretariat.

**Management of Antarctic Environments Portal (see EC19 Paper 20)**

The Antarctic Environments Portal (www.antarctica.aq) has, since 2015, been operated by the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, and supported by a grant provided by the Tinker Foundation. The Tinker Grant has now come to an end and it is planned that SCAR will take over the management of the Portal from 2020 (potentially the first quarter). Over the next year (subject to the exact timing of the handover) the Secretariat/Executive Committee will be involved in a range of activities to ensure a smooth transition, including:

- Participating in and assistance with the organisation of a workshop planned for October 2019,
- Exploring options for technical support and potentially identifying a new technical provider for the portal,
- Development of workflow and recruitment of a new editor,
- Review of operation of management board and editorial group and recruitment of new members as appropriate.

**Potential new areas of activity**

*Boosting donations from the public*

As a registered charity in the UK, SCAR is able to receive charitable donations from the public, and does occasionally receive unsolicited donations from a variety of individuals such as students and tourists to Antarctica. Subject to staff resource, the Secretariat could further investigate options to boost these donations, for example:

- Indirectly, through more effective communication of SCAR’s work to the general public, including tourists visiting Antarctica (see EC19 Paper 29 for more information on communications activities).
- Investigating options for featuring SCAR on fundraising websites such as justgiving.com.

*Environmental Sustainability*

There is increasing interest in understanding and mitigating the environmental footprint of research activities (e.g. through air travel to conferences). Over the coming year, the Secretariat and Executive Committee may wish to consider how SCAR can engage in such discussions and potential actions SCAR could take, such as:

- Provision of guidance and resources on best practice to the SCAR community,
- Investigating support for offsetting the air travel of early career researchers,
- Investigation of technological options to facilitate remote participation in meetings (tools could potentially be centrally administered by the Secretariat and made available to the community as is currently the case with GoToMeeting).
Diversity and inclusion

As a body of the International Science Council, SCAR aims to ensure that all researchers can participate in SCAR’s activities regardless of background. Over the past year, the Secretariat has engaged in some activities to support diversity and inclusion, on an ad-hoc basis, for example by providing technical support to the PolarPride mailing list and by participating in APECS webinars on diversity. This work could be further developed, for example by:

- Creation of new web content on diversity and inclusion,
- Reviewing geographic balance across SCAR groups,
- Further work with APECS to ensure that Early Career Researchers know how to engage with SCAR groups and have opportunities to participate,
- Including information on diversity and inclusion in the Staff Handbook.