

7 June 2023		ITEM: 9
Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education		
Introducing the Pagan Federation		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Deborah Weston, Associate Adviser for Religious Education		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director Learning Inclusion and Skills		
Accountable Director: Shelia Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

This report introduces the Pagan Federation, their regional officer and education officer and a discussion about how SACRE can ensure that pupils in Thurrock schools are educated about the main religious and non-religious groups in their local community.

1. Recommendation(s) that SACRE:

- **Read the factsheet circulated in advance of the meeting and consider questions they might like to ask**
- **Decide whether or not they consider it to be appropriate to recommend to the council to include a representative of the Pagan Federation to join SACRE (Committee A)**

2. Introduction and Background

Group A of SACRE is required by law to include, "Such, Christian denominations and other religious denominations as, in the opinion of the Authority, will approximately reflect the principal religious traditions in the area. In respect of Group A, section 390(6) Education Act 1996 states: The number of representative members appointed to any representative group under subsection (4)(a) [referred to as Group A] to represent each denomination or religion required to be represented shall, so far as consistent with the efficient discharge of the group's functions, reflect broadly the proportionate strength of that denomination or religion in the area.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

At the last meeting of SACRE the minutes record the following:

“Members discussed the possibility of having smaller religious groups represented on SACRE in light of the census results for Thurrock. It was noted that there were very few self-identifying Humanists in Thurrock, but the number of self-identify Pagans (broadly defined) significantly exceeded the national average. It was commented that SACRE had previously resolved to adopt three criteria when adding representatives of smaller religions and beliefs:

1. Is there a meaningful community of faith or belief present in Thurrock?
2. Does the religion or belief system have a national representative body able to nominate a representative?
3. Are the organisation and the nominated individual willing to support the aims and objectives of Thurrock SACRE?

It was agreed by members to request that the Associate Advisor for Religious Education reach out to the Pagan Federation to ask whether there is a Pagan faith community meeting in Thurrock which SACRE would be able to contact to explore opportunities for further engagement.”

For this reason, the associate adviser has invited Keith Tovey, Regional Co-ordinator for the County of Essex outside of Greater London and Jennifer Uzzell; Education Officer for the Pagan Federation to help inform SACRE by making a brief presentation and answer members’ questions.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The census 2021 demonstrates that there are a significant number of people who identify with Pagan Traditions especially with Shamanism – see Appendix A. SACRE has a responsibility to treat all religious and non-religious groups fairly.
- 4.2 Not all traditions prioritise places of worship or indeed, worship at all, and where communities are small, members may travel from Thurrock to neighbouring areas to be involved in activities. This is certainly the case for the Jewish and Buddhist Community in Thurrock.
- 4.3 Similarly, where people record a particular tradition on the census, they may not necessary consider themselves to belong to a community or institutional worldview at all but regard that tradition as part of their individual identity or personal worldview.
- 4.4 If there are significant numbers of people who identify with Pagan traditions in Thurrock, SACRE has a responsibility to consider the representation of that tradition and whether or not membership of Committee A would be helpful to SACRE in discharging its duties.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 The Local Authority reviews its Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education on a regular basis;

- Publishes an Annual Report of its work;
- Offers guidance on resources and methods of teaching and in consultation with Thurrock Schools;
- Monitors the quality of provision for RE and Collective Acts of Worship in Thurrock.

This exercise falls under the third element of this programme.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

There are no financial implications to this report since the actions recommended in this report, if approved will be conducted by the Associate RE Adviser as part of her work

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Nicola Monerville**
Principal Solicitor, on behalf of Thurrock Council

This report is for review and consideration. No decision is required.

390(6) Education Act 1996 requires that Group A of SACRE is representative of Christian and other religious denominations.

The Equality Act 2010 makes it illegal to discriminate against someone because they are of a particular religion, and the guidance published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission makes it clear this applies to smaller religions like Paganism: <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/religion-or-belief-discrimination>

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project Monitoring Officer

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to discriminate against someone because of religion or belief, or because of a lack a religion or belief. Consideration of data from the census about the different religious and non-religious communities in the area will allow SACRE to review its membership and engagement based on the faith and beliefs of the local population.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder or Impact on Looked After Children

- Not applicable

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- Appendix 1 – Census 2021
- Appendix 2 - Factsheet: Paganism

Report Author:

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Associate Adviser for RE

Appendix 1

Census 2021

Religion	Total population Thurrock	% Thurrock 2021	Total Population E&W	% E&W
Christian	90940	51.670%	27522672	46.181%
No religion	60954	34.633%	22105473	37.091%
Religion not stated	9196	5.225%	3595589	6.033%
Muslim	8586	4.878%	3868133	6.490%
Hindu	2376	1.350%	1032775	1.733%
Sikh	2030	1.153%	524140	0.879%
Buddhist	703	0.399%	272508	0.457%
Other religion: Shamanism	247	0.140%	7889	0.013%
Jewish	225	0.128%	271327	0.455%
Other religion	185	0.105%	7889	0.111%
Other religion: Pagan	150 (443 PF)	0.085% (0.25%)	73733	0.124%
Other religion: Spiritualist	89	0.051%	33134	0.056%
Other religion: Spiritual	60	0.034%	31611	0.053%
No religion: Agnostic	52	0.030%	32114	0.054%
Other religion: Mixed Religion	33	0.019%	11402	0.019%
Other religion: Wicca	29	0.016%	12813	0.021%
No religion: Atheist	26	0.015%	13848	0.023%
Other religion: Alevi	15	0.009%	25672	0.043%
Other religion: Jain	12	0.007%	24991	0.042%
Other religion: Satanism	9	0.005%	5054	0.008%
Other religion: Rastafarian	8	0.005%	5948	0.010%
Other religion: Traditional African	8	0.005%	661	0.001%
No religion: Humanist	7	0.004%	10246	0.017%
Other religion: Baha'i	6	0.003%	4716	0.008%
Other religion: Druid	6	0.003%	2490	0.004%
Other religion: Believe in God	6	0.003%	2414	0.004%
Other religion: Own Belief System	6	0.003%	2199	0.004%
Other religion: Heathen	5	0.003%	4721	0.008%
Other religion: Ravidassia	4	0.002%	9572	0.016%
Other religion: Taoist	4	0.002%	3724	0.006%
Other religion: Pantheism	3	0.002%	2299	0.004%
No religion: Free Thinker	3	0.002%	305	0.001%
Other religion: Chinese Religion	3	0.002%	112	0.000%
Other religion: Zoroastrian	2	0.001%	4090	0.007%
Other religion: Scientology	2	0.001%	1859	0.003%
Other religion: Theism	2	0.001%	860	0.001%
Other religion: Universalist	2	0.001%	764	0.001%
Other religion: Witchcraft	1	0.001%	1045	0.002%
Other religion: Animism	1	0.001%	802	0.001%
Other religion: Reconstructionist	1	0.001%	742	0.001%
Other religion: Vodun	1	0.001%	257	0.000%
Other religion: Thelemite	1	0.001%	227	0.000%

Appendix 2

Factsheet: Paganism



Image credit: <https://www.desktopbackground.org/>

by Jennifer Uzzell Source: [Factsheet: Paganism - Religion Media Centre](#)

Summarising Paganism is highly challenging as there is enormous variety across this disparate group of religious movements. Many Pagans consider themselves to not even be religious, others combine their Paganism with other faiths, and there is no consensus around particular beliefs, sacred texts or practices.

Introduction

It is almost impossible to speak of Paganism without generalising. There is great variety not only between, but also within the various Pagan traditions. Some scholars refer to Paganisms rather than Paganism.

The following information details British and Irish Paganism, but there are contemporary Pagan religions in Europe, Australia and the Americas and indeed elsewhere and these may differ significantly from Paganisms in the UK.

What is Paganism?

There is no single definition of Paganism to which all Pagan religions or traditions would assent. Not all regard their path as religious as such. For many “religion” has a negative connotation and they prefer to refer to their path as “spiritual” or as a “philosophy”.

As a generalisation only, Pagan religions tend to be characterised by a veneration of the natural world or as “Nature” as divine; by an engagement in some way or another with a feminine aspect of the divine and with a concern for ecology. These are not without exceptions. There is no sacred text and no consensus regarding divinity.

Some Pagans are “hard polytheists”, believing in the real and separate existence of a multiplicity of gods and goddesses who are separate from each other and with whom humans can enter into reciprocal relationships. Some are “soft polytheists”, using images and language relating to gods and goddesses but regarding these as symbolic, as anthropomorphisms of natural phenomena such as wind and sun, or as projections of aspects of a person’s psyche or subconscious.

Others are duotheists, believing in a God and Goddess, of whom individual gods and goddesses are aspects. Some are monotheist, seeing all gods and goddesses as aspects of a single reality, which may be conceived as male, female or neither.

Some Pagans are atheist, or animist, or combine Paganism with another path such as Christianity or Buddhism. Any of these views can exist within any Pagan tradition. Belief is not the central unifying idea.

The Pagan Federation is an umbrella organisation representing Pagans of all traditions in England and Wales (The Pagan Federation Scotland covers Pagans in Scotland). They act as advisors to the government, the Religious Education Council and offer advice and legal support to Pagans who are experiencing discrimination. It should be noted, however, that many pagans are not affiliated to the PF and do not believe that it represents their concerns.

About 50% of British Pagans are solitary and are not affiliated to any particular tradition. They may have very vibrant online communities and may attend festivals during the summer but otherwise have no contact with other Pagans.

Wicca

Wicca is the most widely known Pagan tradition and the one which is most often represented in the media. Wiccans often refer to themselves as witches. It should be remembered, however, that not all people who self-identify as witches are Wiccans.

Wicca was founded by Gerald Gardner, based, he claimed, on the teachings of the New Forest Coven into which he was initiated in 1939. In 1949, he published *High Magic’s Aid*, a fictional book intended to introduce the teachings of Wicca to the world. In 1954, he published *Witchcraft Today*, sometimes seen as a foundational text of modern Wicca.

Wicca is an initiatory tradition, usually based in covens, which are often closed. Wiccans often regard their teachings as secret and to be revealed only to the initiated, although some groups hold open/public rituals either within their covens or wider Pagan Moots they may be associated with.

Many Wiccans trace their lineage of initiation back either to Gerald Gardner (Gardnerian Wiccans) or to Alex Sanders, who formed a breakaway movement in the 1970s (Alexandrian Wiccans). Alex Sanders’ former wife, Maxine, continues to play a major role within Alexandrian Wicca.

Broadly speaking, Wiccans acknowledge a God and a Goddess, who may or may not be attached to a particular pantheon. Covens may have a High Priest and High Priestess.

Some forms of Wicca (sometimes called Dianic Witchcraft) elevate the Goddess to the status of supreme deity, either omitting or minimising the role of the God.

Many Wiccans keep a so-called Book of Shadows based on a book kept by Gerald Gardner. This is usually a collection of thoughts, recipes, spells etc and functions as a spiritual journal.

A major text within Wicca is Charge of the Goddess, attributed in its present form to Doreen Valiente, who was a priestess within Gardner's original coven.

Some Wiccans believe, as did Gerald Gardner (drawing on the work of Margaret Murray) that the witch trials of the Middle Ages and Early Modern period were persecuting the practitioners of a pre-Christian European religion that honoured a Goddess. Because of the works of Professor Ronald Hutton, who has written extensively on the history of Paganism, many (but not all) have abandoned this belief, seeing Wicca as a modern religion, albeit inspired by the past, that holds great relevance to the modern world.

Most Wiccans celebrate the Wheel of the Year, a cycle of eight seasonal festivals: Yule-Imbolc-Ostara-Beltane-Summer Solstice-Lughnasadh-Mabon-Samhain (although the names Ostara and Mabon are not universally used).

These festivals are celebrated by Wiccans, Druids and most other Pagans in the UK. The order is reversed in the Southern Hemisphere.

Druidry

Druidry is very hard to define. Broadly speaking there are two distinct kinds of Druid order.

Cultural Druidry (such as the Ancient Order of Druids) is a cultural group with its roots in the Celtic Revival of the 18th and 19th It organises the Eisteddfod in Wales and it is this group that various dignitaries such as Winston Churchill and the Queen have been involved with. It is based on Celtic identity and "bardic skills", with its roots in Iolo Morgannwg (Edward Williams), as does pagan Druidry, but it has no connection with religion, Pagan or otherwise.

The other category of Druidry can be more closely identified with Paganism, although not all who are associated with it would identify as Pagan. This category of Druidry has its roots in the writings of Ross Nichols but can be most clearly identified from the 1970s and 80s onwards.

Druids may regard Druidry as a religion, a spirituality, a philosophy, a way of life, or, a cultural aesthetic. There is no universally held set of beliefs, but factors that are common in Druidry are a reverence for nature, a connection with ancestors, however this is understood, a concern for scholarship and a sense of the importance of creative skills (such as music, poetry and writing).

Many forms of Druidry try to cultivate "awen" or poetic inspiration. Many Druids have a concern with ecology and feel a connection to ancient sacred sites.

All forms of Druidry draw inspiration from the Druids mentioned in classical sources from the Iron Age. Some reconstructionist groups attempt to recreate the religious and cultural life of this period as closely as possible. Others look to the model of Druids as scholar priests

but claim that as little can be known of the original Druids we must reinterpret the vision for the modern world.

The largest Druid Order in the UK is the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids which was re-founded in 1988 by Philip Carr-Gomm. He is stepping aside as the 'Chosen Chief' to be replaced by Eimear Burke in 2020. OBOD regards itself as a modern wisdom tradition and is split into three different grades (Bard, Ovate and Druid). It offers a distance learning course in each grade.

The second largest order is the British Druid Order, founded in 1979 by Philip Shallcrass (Greywolf). This order is also divided into the three grades of Bard, Ovate and Druid and offers a distance learning course. The BDO regards Druidry as the indigenous shamanic religion of the British Isles.

Many other Druid orders, networks and organisations exist in the UK, notably the Druid Network, now a registered religious charity; and the Anglesey Druid Order. There are also many solitary practitioners who would identify as Druid.

Like Wiccans, most Druids in the UK celebrate the eight seasonal festivals of the Wheel of the Year.

Heathenry

Heathenry is a branch of Paganism that is specifically concerned with the Norse or Germanic pantheon and culture.

Heathens tend to be organised in small family or localised groups called *hearths* or *kindreds* and may not affiliate with larger organisations. Heathens may, however, join with other local Pagans in moots or other initiatives. The Pagan Heathen Symposium has recently been established.

The main practices within Heathenry are the *blot* (offering, generally of mead) and *symbel*, in which the gods are toasted. Unlike other neo-Pagan groups, Heathens do not tend to cast circles or call the quarters.

Heathens are usually polytheists, believing in the real and separate existence of multiple deities.

There have been accusations of racism levelled against some Heathen groups due to claims that only those of Germanic/Norse heritage can follow this path, however, most Heathen groups have been quick to clearly and publically distance themselves from this viewpoint.

The oldest Heathen group in the UK is the Odinic Rite, founded in 1973. This was granted registered charity status in 1988. Controversy over this led to the group splitting into two factions, with the Odinist Fellowship maintaining charitable status.

Heathen ethics tend to be based on the Nine Virtues and the aphorisms of the Havamal, a book of wisdom and advice for living first written down in the 14th century although the contents are much older.

Goddess Spirituality

This is a tradition that emphasises the feminine aspect of the divine, either by worshipping particular goddesses from a variety of traditions around the world, or by honouring a single

Great Goddess or Mother Goddess. Individual goddesses are sometimes seen as aspects of this Great Goddess. The Goddess Movement arose in the 1970s and was both influenced by, and influenced second wave feminism.

Practitioners of Goddess spirituality may be drawn from any Pagan tradition. Many are Wiccan or witches, but by no means exclusively. Many identify only as worshippers of the Goddess. There are Christians and Jews who likewise seek to emphasise the female energy of the divine in an attempt to “redress the balance” of thousands of years of patriarchy. These people may, or may not identify themselves explicitly with Goddess Spirituality.

The study of the Goddess has come to be known as theology. Many, but not all adherents subscribe to the theory that there was an ancient Matriarchal culture in the Mediterranean during the Bronze Age in which the divine feminine was revered as the Supreme.

This theory is not widely credited by modern archaeology but continues to have significant ideological power. This idea is largely based on the books, *The First Sex* (Elizabeth Gould-Davis, 1971) and *When God was a Woman* (Merlin Stone, 1976).

Probably the largest and most influential expression of Goddess Spirituality in the UK is the Goddess Temple in Glastonbury, established in 2002. This is the first Pagan body in England licensed to conduct weddings.

Dianic Wicca is a specific branch of Wicca, which honours only the Goddess, rather than a Goddess and a God, and which often excludes men from its rituals and ceremonies.

Another well-known and influential Goddess Movement is the Fellowship of Isis, founded in 1976 by Olivia Robertson, her brother Lawrence Durdin-Robertson and his wife, Pamela. Originally based in Ireland, this is a multi-national body that has members from all Pagan paths and none, as well as some who would see themselves predominantly as Christian.

Non-Wiccan Witchcraft

Not all people who identify as witches are Wiccan. Wiccan usually refers to the Gardnerian and Alexandrian lines of initiation. However people may also identify as traditional witches, unconnected to Gardner or Wicca.

A large number of Pagans identify as ‘Hedge witches’. These are solitary practitioners who often specialise in herbal remedies and magic. They may or may not use rituals derived from Wicca such as casting circles and calling the quarters. Some traditional witches claim hereditary lineage going back several generations, often to a village midwife or traditional herbal healer.

Non-Wiccan witches usually celebrate the traditional eight festivals of the year that are common to many types of Paganism in the UK. This is generally referred to as the Wheel of the Year and traces its origins to Gerald Gardner and Ross Nichols, although most of the festivals can be traced back to ancient origins somewhere. There is no evidence that any ancient culture ever celebrated all of them as a single system.

There are also growth areas such as kitchen witchcraft and Fairy or Faerie witchcraft. Traditional or non-Wiccan witches may be solitary or may meet in covens not unlike Wiccans. They may attend generic local Pagan Moots or festivals and they may or may not affiliate with the Pagan Federation.

Eclectic Paganism

There are a number of Pagan traditions that do not fit into any of the categories mentioned above. Many of these would identify with Paganism in general, acknowledging the sacredness of Nature and the significance of the Divine Feminism, but would not necessarily describe themselves as any particular type of Paganism.

These may connect through online communities, may attend local moots or festivals and may subscribe to the Pagan Federation, or they may be completely solitary. Others may belong to a particular tradition such as Hellenic (based on the ancient Greek pantheon) or Kemetic (drawing on the religion of ancient Egypt). There are a very large number of smaller Pagan traditions.

Useful links

The Pagan Federation: <https://paganfed.org>

The Pagan Federation Scotland: <http://www.scottishpf.org>

The Wild Hunt (Pagan news and commentary website): <http://wildhunt.org>

Wicca

Gerald Gardner: <http://geraldgardner.com/index.php>

Information about Wicca: <https://www.wicca.com>

Doreen Valiente: <http://www.doreenvaliente.com/#sthash.KrUygt1T.dpbs>

The Charge of the Goddess: http://www.doreenvaliente.com/Doreen-Valiente-Doreen_Valiente_Poetry-11.php#sthash.YARw2oAp.dpbs

Alex Sanders: http://www.witchcraftandwitches.com/witches_sanders.html

Maxine Sanders: <http://maxinesanders.co.uk>

Druidry

Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids: <https://www.druidry.org>

British Druid Order: <http://www.druidry.co.uk>

The Druid Network: <https://druidnetwork.org>

Anglesey Druid Order: <http://www.angleseydruidorder.co.uk>

Discover Druidry: <https://discoverdruidry.org>

Heathenry

General information: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heathenry>

The Odinic Rite: <http://www.odinic-rite.org>

The Odinist Fellowship: <http://www.odinistfellowship.co.uk>

Asatru UK: <https://www.asatruuk.org> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AsatruUK/>

Pagan Heathen Symposium: <http://pagansymposium.org>

Nine Virtues: <http://www.odinsvolk.ca/O.V.A.%20-%20NNV.htm>

Goddess Spirituality

Glastonbury Goddess Temple: <http://www.goddesstemple.co.uk>

Key figures: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/panmankey/2014/05/10-important-figures-in-goddess-spirituality/>

Introduction to Goddess Spirituality: <http://www.lyssanda-designs.com/blog/1>

Goddess spirituality and feminism: <https://neo-paganism.com/history-of-neo-paganism/feminist-spirituality-movement/>

The Goddess

Movement: https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoypizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/Goddess_movement.html

Dianic

Wicca: https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoypizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/Dianic_Wicca.html

The Fellowship of Isis: <http://www.fellowshipofisis.com>

Non-Wiccan Witchcraft

The Wheel of the Year: http://www.thewhitegoddess.co.uk/the_wheel_of_the_year/

Hedge Witchcraft: <http://www.scottishpf.org/hedgewitch.html>

Kitchen Witchcraft: <https://www.thoughtco.com/about-kitchen-witches-2562549>

Fairy Witchcraft: <http://sarahannelawless.com/2009/09/15/fairy-traditions/>

Eclectic Paganism

Kemetic Paganism: <https://www.thoughtco.com/egyptian-paganism-kemetic-reconstruction-2562547>

Hellenic Paganism: <http://wildhunt.org/2017/04/greek-paganism-legally-recognized-as-known-religion-in-greece.html>

Brythonic Polytheism: <http://www.penton.co.za/brythonic-gods-and-polytheist-reconnection-interview-with-lee-davies/>

Jennifer Uzzell is a doctoral researcher at Durham University and education and youth manager at the Pagan Federation