

Isle of Anglesey County Council	
MEETING:	SACRE / County Council
DATE:	February 21 st / March 7 th , 2024
TITLE OF REPORT:	Membership and constitution of the Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE)
AUTHOR:	Jane Ashman
HEAD OF SERVICE	Marc Berw Hughes, Director of Education, Skills and Young People
PURPOSE OF THE REPORT:	For the Council to agree to amend the membership and name of the SACRE following the legislative changes arising as a result of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021
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1. Background:

Under the Education Act 1996 (EA1996), the Local Education Authority (LEA) has a duty to establish a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE).

As a result of legislative changes to sections 390 to 392 of the EA1996, brought about by the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 (CA(W)A2021), the requirement that a local authority constitute a SACRE has been replaced, subject to a transitional period, by a requirement to constitute a Standing Advisory Council (SAC) on Religion, Values and Ethics (RVE).

The brief of the SAC is broader than that of SACRE in that it encompasses not only religion but the RVEs (values and ethics) of the new Curriculum for Wales Framework.

In addition to the broader brief, the composition of SAC differs from that of the former SACRE in that it must now include representatives who hold non-religious philosophical convictions.

The EA1996, as amended, stipulates that SAC should include the following group of members (additional elements, as added by the CA(W)A2021 in italics):

- A group of persons that represents the Christian denominations and other religions and denominations of such religions, *and non-religious philosophical convictions* - that in the LEA's judgment, *reflect broadly the proportionate strength of that religion, denomination or non-religious philosophical conviction in the area;*
- A group that represents the associations of those teachers whom the LEA judge should be represented, taking the area's circumstances into consideration; and
- A group to represent the LEA.

It is also possible to have co-opted members; they do not have voting rights.

In order to comply with legislation, and in accordance with [SACRE's decision in November 2020](#) to review its Constitution when legislative changes were introduced by Welsh

Government, work has been done by officers in the Learning Service, and which support SACRE, to review the membership of religious and non-religious representatives.

2. Review of Membership:

The legislation does not provide details of which religions, denominations or non-religious philosophical convictions need to be considered for inclusion on SAC. The legislation also does not offer guidance on the data that should be relied upon in order to allocate seats; it details that it is a decision for the LEA based on a view that the membership broadly reflects the proportionate strength of that religion, denomination or non-religious philosophical conviction in the area.

The current membership of relevant representatives, which has not been reviewed for many years, includes six Christian denominations and no representatives from other religions or non-religious philosophical convictions.

Officers from Learning Service have undertaken a desktop analysis of religious and non-religious groups in Anglesey. The detail of the process undertaken and the findings made are as follows:

➤ **Census:**

The review conducted by officers from the Learning Service considered the [results, for Anglesey, of the religion question within the 2021 Census](#) as a starting point, whilst bearing in mind that the Census question on religion was an optional one and so the results may not be an absolute reflection of the population's religious/non-religious beliefs, but it should be noted that only 6.5% of the people of Anglesey did not answer this question. The full results are included in **Enclosure 1**.

➤ **Further investigation:**

Correspondence was sent by officers from the Learning Service to the groups listed in **Enclosure 2** to this report with a request for information on membership numbers for Anglesey. Correspondence was initially sent on 11.08.2023; a reminder was sent on 18.08.2023 with a request for responses by 23.08.2023. To ensure that all groups were given a reasonable opportunity to respond to this request for information, and so that contact could be made with representatives from the Quaker denomination and Sikhism religion (who were not included in the first cohort), further correspondence was sent by officers from the Learning Service on 06.10.2023, and a reminder sent on 25.10.2023; responses were expected by 06.11.2023. Details of the responses received by the Learning Service, are included in **Enclosure 2**.

3. Conclusion:

The data obtained in this exercise is incomplete.

- The Census information (**Enclosure 1**) provides a general view of religion/non-religion on Anglesey but it does not provide the detail to ascertain the strength of the different denominations.
- There have been very few responses to the correspondence sent by the Learning Service to the identified groups detailed in **Enclosure 2**.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the following recommendation is based on the imperfect data currently available, it follows reasonable attempts by the Learning Service to

ascertain the relevant information. It is unlikely that allowing a delay in order to carry out further consultation would result in any further data being made available; this recommendation is therefore considered to be a reasonable proposal in all the circumstances.:-

A. Christianity

As the Census figures show that Christianity is the most populated answer to this query and remains the strongest religion in Anglesey (35,485 people / 51.5%) it is reasonable and in accordance with the legislation that it continues to hold the majority of seats on SAC.

There are many denominations within Christianity. The Census does not explore in any more detail than this and so it isn't possible to determine information about the different denominations that make up this response.

Six different denominations are currently represented on SACRE, namely Presbyterian Church of Wales; Baptist Union of Wales; Union of Welsh Independents; Catholic Church; Methodist Church and Church in Wales. These, and others, were contacted by the Learning Service for current membership figures; the responses are included in **section (a) of Enclosure 2**.

Whilst there are only limited direct responses to requests for membership numbers from many of the Christian denominations, it is apparent that Church in Wales, Catholics and protestant non-conformists are represented in Anglesey, and on that basis **it is suggested that the six current Christian denominations continue to be offered one seat each on SAC**.

As noted in **section (a) of Enclosure 2**, there are 500 Jehovah's Witness members on Anglesey, a figure that is far higher than the membership numbers obtained from the Baptist Union of Wales and the Methodist Church (both of whom are already represented on SACRE). The response is similar to the membership number for the Union of Welsh Independents (a representative of whom already has a seat on SACRE). On the basis of this figure, obtained directly in response to the Learning Service's enquiries with them, **it is suggested that a Jehovah's Witness representative be allocated a seat on SAC**.

B. No religion

The second most populated answer to the Census question was that of "no religion" (28,066 people / 40.7%). This is a wide-ranging response and can include a range of individuals that may or may not identify with a belief system e.g. atheist; agnostic; spiritual but not religious, etc.; though it is apparent from the Office for National Statistics' data (**Enclosure 1**) that some members of these groups have noted their response under "other" rather than "no religion", and so the number is not entirely reliable. The option 'other' had a result of 0.4% in Anglesey.

It is reasonable to consider that a percentage of those that responded as having "no religion" are not part of any group, and on that basis, there is no obvious representative for this large proportion of the population. It is not possible to appoint an individual that simply identifies as being of "no religion"; the individual must be a representative of a *non-religious philosophical conviction*, the statutory definition of which must show a conviction

(not an idea or an opinion) that attains a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance.

Possible groups that satisfy this definition of a *non-religious philosophical conviction* were identified and contacted by the Learning Service officers; their responses are included in **section (b) of Enclosure 2**.

On the basis that the relevant SAC representatives must now include representation of persons who hold a non-religious philosophical conviction, if the LEA considers that appointing such persons reflects the proportionate strength of that religion, denomination or non-religious philosophical conviction in the area, it appears reasonable that a seat is offered to a group that can satisfy this definition.

Whilst the numbers for Humanists UK members in Anglesey is unknown, on the basis no other groups are known / information known to be able to consider, **it appears reasonable to offer a seat on SAC to a representative of Humanists UK in order to ensure there is representation for a non-religious philosophical conviction perspective on the Isle of Anglesey County Council's SAC.**

It is accepted that Humanists UK do not represent the views of all those identifying as having "no religion" or "other" in the Census. However, as an organisation, it satisfies the legislative definition of representing persons with a non-religious philosophical conviction. Humanists UK have seats on several other SACs too.

C. Other non-Christian religions

The Census figures (**Enclosure 1**) indicate very low numbers for other non-Christian religions, ranging from 328 (Muslim) to Jewish and Sikh, both with 30 each. **Section (c) of Enclosure 2** details the responses received to the correspondence from the Learning Service from those religions identified on the Census list of possible responses.

The Census results show that the strongest non-Christian religion in Anglesey is Islam. It is therefore reasonable to **allocate one seat to a representative of Islam on SAC.**

4. Possible Options

Do nothing and fail to meet statutory requirements.

- Not updating the membership requirement for SAC runs the risk that the Authority is not meeting its legal obligations and that SAC is not properly constituted, thereby exposing any decision the SAC makes to the potential risk of legal challenge.

Make changes that comply with statutory requirements.

- Recommending the proposed changes will help to ensure the Authority is complying with its legal requirement for SAC.
- The Committee must contain representatives from other interests (as detailed in section 1 of this report) in order to function as a working committee; the proposal to have a total of 9 religious/non-religious representatives is reasonable and complies with the legal requirement.

5. Recommendation:

- 1) That full Council agrees to amend the name for SACRE to SAC and for its terms of reference to be included in the Council's Constitution by the Monitoring Officer, in accordance with the legislative requirement for SAC; and
- 2) That on the basis the local authority must take all reasonable steps to secure that the membership is broadly proportionate to the strength of each religion, denomination, or non-religious philosophical conviction, in its local area, full Council agrees that the membership of SAC includes a total of 9 seats, made up of 6 seats to the current members and an additional 3 new seats, as follows:

1	Humanists UK (<i>additional</i>)
2	Baptist Union of Wales
3	Islam (<i>additional</i>)
4	Jehovah's Witness (<i>additional</i>)
5	Presbyterian Church of Wales
6	Union of Welsh Independents
7	The Catholic Church
8	Methodist Church
9	Church in Wales

2021 Census results for Anglesey

The religion people connect or identify with, as detailed in the 2021 Census results for Anglesey (and following the same reporting order):

	Number of responses in the 2021 Census
No religion	40.7% (28,066)
Christian	51.5% (35,485)
Buddhist	0.2% (154)
Hindu	0.1%(62)
Jewish	0% (30)
Muslim	0.5% (328)
Sikh	0% (30)
Other religion	0.4% (278)
Not answered	6.5% (4,446)

[The Office for National Statistics](#) details that, of those that answered “other” across England and Wales (not specific for Anglesey) the following were some of the more common religious groups noted: Alevi, Jain, Pagan, Ravidassia, Rastafarian, Shamanism, Wicca and Zoroastrian; and the non-religious groups named were: Agnostic, Atheist and Humanist.

Enclosure 2

Membership of different groups/organisations on Anglesey

An email/contact form was sent by the Learning Service to the listed groups on 11.08.2023 to request membership numbers. A reminder email was sent on 18.08.2023 asking for a response by 23.08.2023.

Further contact was made by the Learning Service on 06.10.2023 to those groups that had not responded to the above request for information. Responses were requested by 6.11.2023. A telephone call / email reminder was made on 25.10.2023.

a. Christian Denominations:

Number of responses in the 2021 Census: 35,485

	Number of members in Anglesey detailed by each group
Quaker	25
Presbyterian Church of Wales	No response received
English Presbyterian Church	No contact details could be ascertained
Pentecostal Church	135
Pioneer Church	80
Jehovah's Witness	500
Baptist Union of Wales	168
Union of Welsh Independents	488
The Catholic Church	255
Methodist Church	61
Church in Wales	No response received

b. No religion:

Number of responses in the 2021 Census

- No religion 40.7% (28,066)
- Not answered 6.5% (4,446)
- Other 0.4% (278)

	Number of responses in the 2021 Census	Number of members in Anglesey detailed by each group
Humanist UK	Not an option in the Census	Unknown. 4,000 in Wales.
Anglesey Druid Order	Not an option in the Census	No response received

c. Other religions:

	Number of responses in the 2021 Census	Number of members in Anglesey detailed by each group
Buddhism	154	No contact details available. Closest group is Llandudno.
Hinduism	62	No contact details available. No references online to any Hindu temples or societies in North Wales.
Judaism	30	Response details this information is unknown. Closest group is Llandudno.
Islam	328	Response details this information is unknown. No mosques in Anglesey; Bangor Islamic Centre is closest.
Sikhism	30	No response received