The fringe is the centre: Racism, pseudoscience and authoritarianism in the dominant English education policy network

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ABSTRACT

The term 'chumocracy' has been used to describe a tendency within the UK's Conservative government to appoint friends and allies to key public positions; this image seriously underestimates the scale and influence of networks that shape policy and supply individuals to key roles. This paper maps networks that converge around conservative and sometimes extreme views on race and education. These networks include media figures, academics, public officials and a range of campaigning organisations. They are characterized by an authoritarian ideology, including hereditarian and pseudoscientific beliefs, that views Black and working-class populations as unstable and threatening. They shape policies that seek to silence critical debate about structural racism, while promoting an education characterised by intensified testing, selection, curricular control and strict discipline.

1. Introduction

In April 2022 a mixture of anger and disbelief greeted remarks by Katherine Birbalsingh, Chair of the Social Mobility Commission (a body intended to champion progress in dismantling barriers around class, gender and ethnic inequalities) when she told a parliamentary inquiry that she was not at all concerned about the under-representation of female students studying physics. She explained that 'physics isn't something that girls tend to fancy … I just think they don't like it. There's a lot of hard maths in there'. Pushed to explain herself, Birbalsingh claimed that 'Research generally, they say that's just a natural thing' (BBC News, 2022). World-leading scientists, including female physicists, condemned the statements as 'terrifying', 'patronising', 'outdated stereotypes' that have no basis in research evidence (Devlin, 2022). The episode drew attention to the seemingly incongruous appointment of Birbalsingh to a role intended to champion progressive reform despite her long and highly publicized role as a staunch defender of 'traditional' educational values, rejecting calls for a focus on race- and gender-equity in favour of an authoritarian, top-down emphasis on strict discipline, hierarchical academic selection and a belief in innate differences in ability between children (Buckingham, 2020). Birbalsingh's appointment was not an anomaly; it was typical of the flow of ideas, people and influence through networks that, over the past decade, have converged around conservative and sometimes extreme views on race and education, and have moved from fringe

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activism to positions of influence at the heart of English education policy.

These networks of political and ideological allies include media figures, academics, public officials and a range of think tanks and campaigning organisations. The networks differ in their principal focus but can be generally characterized as viewing Black and working-class populations as an unstable and threatening social presence. They reject social structural accounts of difference and inequalities, and are attracted to authoritarianism, and hereditarian and pseudoscientific beliefs about intelligence and cultural deficiency. These views manifest in campaigns and policies that seek to silence critical debate about structural racism and race inequity, while promoting an education system characterised by intensified testing, selection, curricular control and strict discipline – approaches that are known to exacerbate race inequity (Gillborn et al., 2021). The policy influence exerted by these networks is, at least in part, bound up in the rise of a populist political movement in the UK (Zembylas, 2020), culminating in the election in 2019 of a Conservative government led by Prime Minister Boris Johnson. While education reform has been a consistent focus for the political right in the UK (Apple, 2001; Benn, 2011), the election of the Johnson-led Government marked a quickening tempo to the irruption of cultural conflict around race in education, including skirmishes on diversity in the curriculum (Department for Education, 2022; Sundorph, 2020), teaching critical race theory (Weale, 2022, Wynn-Davies, 2022), and 'no excuses' behaviour management (Edwards, 2022).

In this paper we identify three interconnected conservative networks that we call the *IQists*, the *Anti-Antiracists*, and the *Authoritarian Educators*. Their networking activity simultaneously supports this populist, nativist politics and is accelerated by it as their ideas and their members cut across, and to a degree blur, the boundaries of governmental and civic domains. Our identification and naming of these networks reflects an analytic focus on the mobilities of people and ideas as these networks interpenetrate each other and public and governmental institutions. The entanglements that result from these mobilities create the capacity for more or less systematic and coordinated accounts of and responses to policy problems. As such, the current article joins the field of literature on network governance theory that analyses the mobile contingencies of the expanded horizontal space of education policy network relations. However, our focus on race and education is distinctive in a literature in which neoliberalism has been the primary focus, and it requires a consideration of the specific reciprocities of network governance and structural racism. Our focus on anti-Black racism, in particular, reflects the significance of Black British communities as amongst the leading forces historically in campaigns for greater race equality (John 2006; Warmington 2014) and a tendency for the specificities of anti-Black racism to be lost amid more general accounts of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity (Dumas & ross, 2016).[1] Using the concepts of 'intellectual flow' and 'knotworking' (Engeström, 2000), we argue that white supremacy[2] should be considered as a motor of the dynamic of network governance in education, and an activity of prominent policy networks in England, structuring the objects, activity and effects of education policy networks.

2. Racism and network governance

As an approach to education policy sociology, network governance has attended to the contemporary significance of networks as "'indirect' mechanisms for aligning economic, social and personal conduct with socio-political objectives" (Miller & Rose, 1993: 76), and in particular the translation of neoliberal political rationalities into practice. The literature has explored how the social relations of people and organisations - their ways of networking, of constituting projects of common interest and activity, of producing and measuring value, of recognising subjects - are reliant on and reinforcing of the subject of self-discipline, productivity and enterprise (Ball, 2012). Such networking has made for flatter, more diverse and, in some respects, more mobile ensembles of relations that facilitate flows of knowledge, people, data and capital across organisational, professional and sectoral, national, and state/civil boundaries. The conceptualisation of governance as comprising a relatively decentralised 'ensemble of institutions, procedures, tactics, calculations, knowledges and technologies' (Gane & Johnson, 1993: 7) to which networks and flows (Urry, 2010) provide a form and logic of performance has made possible the exploration of the complex spatialities of contemporary policy-making. Notably, conceptualising and representing the expanded horizontal spaces of education policy has led to new understandings of neoliberalism as a 'mobile and adaptive force' (Wilkins, 2022) that has disrupted the bureaucratic hierarchies of educational provision centred on the state and its institutions.

Our investigation explores the simultaneity of an 'intellectual flow' around race and education with networking activity and the policy effectivity that these networks gain. Our use of the term 'intellectual flow' borrows from and adapts the concept of an 'intellectual technology' from Miller & Rose (2008: 31) which they describe as language that 'provides a mechanism for rendering reality amenable to certain kinds of action'. Miller and Rose describe such a technology in the context of a discussion of governmentality. As such, intellectual technologies form a discursive component of an assemblage that effects power through the constitution of a shared knowledge of 'objects of policy' that are legitimately and plausibly amenable to intervention (ibid.). With our emphasis on *network* governance, we understand intellectual *flow* to refer to 'various fluid-like movements' (Urry, 2010: 352) of ideas, logic and representation that are capable of transgressing boundaries of institution, sector, and indeed of nation. We understand such flows as productive (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004a,2004b), in the sense that the circulation of certain ideas, forms of representation, or logics

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[1] These developments intersect with other forms of anti-equity mobilizations in contemporary politics, including a rise in Islamophobia and aggressive attacks on LGBTQ+ rights (Kitching 2022; Sian 2017). Each of these is likely to have specific, but related, networks of influence, the study of which is beyond the scope of a single article.

[2] By *white supremacy* we do not mean the extreme and obvious racist posturing of neo-Nazi groups, but rather the comprehensive taken-for-granted centrality of white racial interests at the heart of political and economic decision making (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

around race and education establish a 'sympathy' among subjects that amounts to a 'co-functioning' produced not through the co-ercions of hierarchical structures (of the institutions of bureaucratic government, for example) but on a more horizontal plane of affective connections (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006; Müller & Schurr, 2016). Such movements of ideas about race and education are productive of network connections while at the same time network relations provide circuits for the sharing and distribution of these forms of language. Intellectual flows effect an identification, shared values and a common sense of the 'policy problem' (Lingard, 2013: 119), and an emergent capacity for purposeful action than can include both new capacities actualised through network relations and the redirection of existing personal or organisational capacity and capitals.

A further sense in which we can think with the term *flow*, is through the notion of the 'fluid object' (de Laet & Mol, 2000; Law & Singleton, 2005; Mol & Law, 1994; Müller & Schurr, 2016). This sense of fluid-like movement emphasises the continuity of the object despite changes in the relations that constitute that object. 'Fluidity' has been used to describe the sense in which an object:

> "…may be imagined as a set of relations that changes. Oxymoronically, it is something that both changes and stays the same. Indeed, the argument is even stronger than this. This is because staying the same may also depend upon changes…What we have here, then is…a class of objects [that] may be understood as a set of relations that gradually shifts and adapts itself rather than one that holds itself rigid.' (Law & Singleton, 2005: 338-339)

Law's definition calls to mind Bonilla-Silva's depiction of race itself (as a set of social relations) as a 'changing same' that is continuously remade across history because 'it must deal with new information to maintain its legitimation purposes' (Bonilla-Silva, 2015: 79); its mutability accounts for its durability.

Fluidity as change without difference (Mol & Law, 1994) is a flip side to the coin of the productivity of an intellectual flow. Fluidity as a feature of policy networks might help us understand the possibility of persistence during periods when the elements and orga-nisation of policy networks change even in substantial ways. In this sense, the intertwined representational and intervention functions of policy networks - the ways in which policy problems are constituted and acted upon through networks - may be understood in a reproductive sense, the reproduction of structural racism in education through network governance.

The point here is not that there are two kinds of networking in the field of policy, but that we require an account of a policy network that 'subsists in, and participates in the enactment of…different spatial logics' (Law & Singleton, 2005: 348) simultaneously. The theorisation of the productivity of an 'intellectual flow' allows us to explore the consolidation of new policy networks around race and education (with new capacities to act, to circulate ideas, and constitute subjects), *and at the same time* to appreciate the continuing participation of network governance in racialisation and the production of race inequities in education. This allows for a concept of 'intellectual flow' to function as a methodological tool for the practice of a kind of 'ontological politics' (Mol, 1999); as, to paraphrase Law and Singleton, a tool for considering different processes by which this complex reality is enacted (Law & Singleton, 2005: 334) and making representational choices. In this paper we delineate distinct policy networks that have emerged from the unpredictable mutability of a complex field of relations - often ostensibly organised around other affiliations such as evidence-based teaching practice, or research in the field of genetics - and have found a degree of consistency that constitutes a capacity for activity in the field of education policy. It is our analytic and representational choice to name them as a way of engaging with the politics of flows of this field. Yet even as we point to the formation of new policy networks, we highlight these formations as the reproduction of a historical white supremacy (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Leonardo, 2004) immanent to and therefore structuring of the supposedly 'flat' field of policy governance. In exploring how these emergent ensembles have been produced through forms of activism in conjunction with an authoritarian populist government, we recognise them as repetitions, re-instantiations of a racism that structures policy relations. They are the changing elements of education policy as a formation that participates in the 'active structuring of racial inequity' (Gillborn, 2005: 4). The emergence of new relationships and affinities, new tactics in the field of cultural conflict, rhetoric, new forms of organisation, new political identifications are enacting *fluidity* as change without difference, a change that sustains Whiteness in education.

These tactics, rhetorics, forms of organisation and identification emerge as these networks assume the power[3] to take action as an ensemble. From this perspective, an 'intellectual flow' is a way to understand the principles by which such organisation has been produced and the logic of its performance. The three policy networks we describe are entangled, sharing what might, borrowing from Engeström, be called policy 'knotworking' (Engeström, 2000; Engeström et al., 1999): a growing policy effectivity through a 'distributed and partially improvised orchestration of collaborative performance between otherwise loosely connected actors and activity systems' (Engeström, 2000: 972). Engeström's choice of the term 'knotworking' resonates with the current paper's attention to 'fluidity' and 'flow', in that it is post-bureaucratic and object-orientated. Engeström emphasises that the collections of actors around particular policy objects are shifting and dynamic, rather than organisationally stable. The networks we identify in this paper comprise shifting 'knots' of players whose promotion of the influence of racial pseudoscience and (racialised) authoritarianism in education policy persists as collective action, even as they assume different campaign titles and institutional affiliations over time.

As we argue below, these networks share common tactics – of astroturfing (the pretence of being a spontaneous and apolitical 'grass-roots' campaign), the deployment of pseudo-academic credibility, the characterisation of anti-racist critique as antagonistic and oppressive to the white majority among others – but what guides collective action is not the knots which 'formed, dissolved, and re-formed as the object is co-configured time and time again' (Engeström, 2000: 973), but the *object* of white supremacy. And it is this policy object that, we argue, should guide our understanding of the action of these networks; in short, our analysis of policy networks is

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[3] Understood here in the sense of *pouvoir* (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004b) as a set of concrete arrangements that allows an assemblage to be effective.

object-orientated. White supremacy is collaboratively constructed through distributed activity across these policy networks and as they evolve and change over time. As such, though the networks we describe will no doubt be different by the time of this publication, perhaps in important ways, their exploration allows us to attend to the space of education policy in a manner that foregrounds the desire for white supremacy as an animating force of education policy, and that requires consideration of both its horizontal expansion and its 'mixes' of 'hierarchies', 'markets', or 'networks' (Davies, 2012: 2700); of how the forms of subjectivity and instrumentalities of neoliberal network governance form a contingent modality for the reproduction of structural racism and the hegemonic relations that sustain populist government.

3. Policy network analysis

In this section we explore the links between networked actors and organisations that express pseudoscientific and authoritarian views about the nature of race, ability and education; especially on questions concerning intelligence (who has 'more' and 'less' of it) and how public schooling should be conducted. The data were gathered and analysed utilizing an approach that has been termed 'network ethnography' (Ball, 2012; Howard, 2002). These actors and organizations play a variety of roles: including politicians, political advisors, academics, commentators and/or journalists. The organisations self-identify as think tanks, academic bodies and grass-roots collectives of interested professionals/citizens – although some of these descriptions are misleading at best.

Our approach borrows from Kozinets' (2015) notion of 'netnography' insofar as much of our data is publicly available on websites and social media. As the analysis progresses, we explore the connections that reveal a network of policy actors who promote a view of public education as in crisis, threatened by the disorder and ignorance of those who embody leftist and/or race equity education goals. Their solutions involve a consistent set of beliefs about discipline, high status curricula, and the need for hierarchical selection all set within a context where any critical discussion of race inequity is silenced as 'divisive' trouble-making.

4. The IQists

In February 2020, Prime Minister Johnson's spokesperson refused, *thirty times,* to clarify the PM's position on the supposed racial inferiority of Black people (Smith, 2020).

Q (JOURNALISTS): Does the PM think black people have a lower IQ than white people?
A: PM'S DEPUTY OFFICIAL SPOKESMAN: I've answered your question.
Q: That was a different question.
A: The Prime Minister's views are well publicised and well documented.
Q: Can you remind us of the Prime Minister's views
A: As I say, they're well publicised and well documented.
Q: Can you direct us to where to find the PM's views on eugenics?
A: I've answered the question.

The question of intelligence and its supposed basis in human biology periodically resurfaces in education and policy circles (Flint & Peim, 2012). Despite the key arguments having been repeatedly and thoroughly debunked, there is a residual fascination and a political investment in sustaining a belief that the wealthy owe their power and riches to their innate genetic make-up and that poverty and low achievement are a natural inevitability of personal and cultural deficiencies among the poor (Evans, 2018). In relation to race inequity, these arguments are especially damaging: first, because they are predicated upon pseudoscientific categories of race and, second, because they reimagine the effects of decades (even centuries) of racist exclusion and oppression as an evolutionary flaw that not only excuses the current racial hierarchy in favour of whites but suggests that such an arrangement is both inevitable and beneficial for society as a whole (for critiques see Gillborn, 2016; Kamin, 1974; Kinchloe et al., 1996; Montague, 1999; Saini, 2019). Such beliefs are often considered maverick, extreme or as archaic views long abandoned by the political mainstream; and yet they are shared among people at the very heart of policy-making.

Downing Street and Hereditarian race pseudoscientists

It is necessary to distinguish between those who advocate a strong genetic determination for overall levels of intelligence (an *hereditarian* position) and those who go on to state that Black people, as a group, are genetically pre-disposed to have less intelligence on average than white people (whom we term '*race pseudoscientists*'). Despite its claims to scientific credibility – carefully constructed through self-citation and unfounded hyperbole – a view of academic achievement as largely pre-determined by genetics is far from mainstream and, in fact, stands well outside the consensus of scientific debate (Jackson & Winston, 2021; Panofsky, 2014; Skiba, 2012). There was a great deal of media interest when, in 2013, it emerged that **Dominic Cummings**, then a key advisor to **Michael Gove** (UK Education Secretary, 2010-14) and subsequently chief advisor to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson (2019-2020), had written a lengthy 'essay' that castigated the education world for its failure to engage with the 'relevant science' concerning 'evolutionary influences' on intelligence. Cummings also revealed that he had arranged for **Robert Plomin** to speak at the Department for Education (DfE) in order 'to explain the science of IQ and genetics to officials and Ministers' (Cummings, 2013: 64).

As we have discussed previously (Gillborn, 2016), Cummings' endorsement of Plomin caused great excitement among right-wing newspapers, who trumpeted their (mistaken) view that genes (or genetic inheritance) have a greater effect on children's attainment

than the education they receive in school:

> Genetics, not your school, is biggest factor in exam success: DNA twice as significant as environmental factors, *Daily Mail* (Spencer, 2013)
>
>   GCSE results 'influenced by children's genes, not teaching', *Daily Telegraph* (Paton, 2013)

The headlines reflect a fundamental, and dangerous, misunderstanding of the measurement of '*heredity*' in intelligence research which is entirely different to its meaning in everyday life. These heritability calculations 'refer to a statistical model developed for plant and animal breeding' (Fischbach & Niggeschmidt, 2021; 5) which aims to describe the proportion of differences in performance (variation) within a group at a specific time; the measures are not applicable beyond that group; they are not fixed; the data do not relate to the overall level of performance (achievement), nor do they explain *individual* differences. These limitations are usually acknowledged in the small print of articles by those advocating for the 'science' of genetics and intelligence, but entirely absent from their grand claims and public advocacy (see Comfort, 2018; Gillborn, 2016; Jackson & Winston, 2021). Indeed, it has been argued that Plomin's media profile depends on 'casually blurring the distinction between everyday and technical meanings of the word "heritable"' (Fischbach & Niggeschmidt, 2021, 2-3).

Plomin's recent work has been silent on the topic of race and intelligence (Comfort, 2018; Gillborn, 2016) but this was not always the case. In 1994 he signed up to a series of statements that explicitly supported a view of intelligence as genetically shaped and stated that the average Black IQ is significantly less than the average white IQ (*Wall Street Journal*, 1994). The ***WSJ article*** was written and coordinated by **Linda Gottfredson** a long-term advocate of the race pseudoscience position, who is classified as a 'White Nationalist' extremist by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2022b). Other signatories include some of the most infamous IQists of the late 20th century (including **Arthur Jensen, J. Philippe Rushton, Richard Lynn**, and **Hans Eysenck** – all renowned for their belief that Black people are genetically predisposed to lower IQs than white people (for further detail on all these writers, see Lynn, 2001). Plomin no longer voices this view, but neither has he publicly disavowed these statements. In a 2015 BBC radio interview he said "I regret it to the extent it's a distraction to my research. But I think the basic facts are there… erm, about heritability of intelligence…" (BBC Radio 4, 2015). Cummings' also has avoided any public comment on the race dimension of the hereditarian argument (cf. Gillborn, 2016).

In 2019 Cummings was appointed as Chief Advisor to the prime minister **Boris Johnson,** with whom he had worked on the **Vote Leave** campaign (which successfully argued for Britain's exit from the European Union (EU) in the 2016 Referendum). In early 2020 it emerged that **Andrew Sabisky** an advisor to Boris Johnson (appointed following a recruiting blog by Cummings), not only held hereditarian views but had been plain about their implication for *race* inequity:

> If the mean black American IQ is (best estimate based on a century's worth of data) around 85, as compared to a mean white American IQ of 100, then if IQ is normally distributed (which it is), you will see a far greater percentage of blacks than whites in the range of IQs 75 or below, at which point we are close to the typical boundary for mild mental retardation.
>
>   (Sabisky blog post, 2014, quoted in Proctor & Murphy, 2020)

Following the initial furore over Cummings' IQism in 2013, Boris Johnson (then London Mayor) had spoken publicly about the importance of intelligence in relation to questions of equity and policy:

> [competition] is operating on human beings who are already very far from equal in raw ability, if not spiritual worth. Whatever you may think of the value of IQ tests, it is surely relevant to a conversation about equality that as many as 16% of our species have an IQ below 85, while about 2% have an IQ above 130. The harder you shake the pack, the easier it will be for some cornflakes to get to the top. (Johnson, 2013)

The discovery of a race pseudoscientist (Sabisky) within Johnson's staff led to the exchange that we quoted at the beginning of this section. Sabisky soon resigned and was portrayed as a rogue appointment of no wider significance: in the words of one minister, 'it's unfortunate he was hired. He's now left and we can now all move on' (quoted in Proctor, 2020). But Sabisky's appointment in Downing Street highlights further links between policymakers and the most extreme forms of race pseudoscience.

In 2015 Sabisky presented at the '**London Conference on Intelligence**' (LCI) organised by **James Thompson,** an honorary senior lecturer at University College London (UCL). Thompson is a race pseudoscientist who states plainly that intelligence is significantly determined by genetic factors and that Black people are on average less intelligent than their white peers: 'A larger proportion of black kids are naturally dull…' (Thompson, 2014).

The LCI stopped in 2018, following negative publicity arising from the attendance of **Toby Young** - who mentioned the LCI in a speech about intelligence (Young, 2018). It came to light as journalists trawled Young's articles, blogs and tweets when he was named to the board of the '**Office for Students**' (OfS) – the independent regulator of higher education in England. Despite receiving the support of **Boris Johnson** – then Foreign Secretary (Grierson & Rawlinson, 2018) - the negative publicity surrounding Young's history of sexist tweets, attacks on inclusive education and views on intelligence, led him to resign the post. Young is clear in an hereditarian belief in intelligence as fixed and genetically shaped (Young, 2015), and has co-authored with Plomin (Smith-Woolley et al 2018), but explicitly warns like-minded thinkers not to discuss race differences in public (Young, 2018: 5).

Several LCI attendees published a co-authored rebuttal where they argued that the conference's focus on race and eugenics had been exaggerated: 'a modest minority (38.7%, or 29) of the 75 talks given over four years dealt with population (racial, ethnic and national) IQ differences' (Woodley of Menie, et al., 2018, 85). Among the co-authors are **Richard Lynn.** Classified as a 'White Nationalist' by the Southern Poverty Law Center, he is current editor of ***Mankind Quarterly*** - a journal that Lynn admits was created to

provide a medium for race pseudoscience that was no longer widely accepted in established journals (Lynn, 2001, 458; Saini, 2019: 98). Numerous editorial board members have received direct funding from the **Pioneer Fund** – the principal funder of racist pseudoscience over the last 60 years. In his official history of the Fund, Lynn devotes separate chapters to key race pseudoscientists who have received Pioneer funding, including Jensen, Eysenck, Rushton and Gottfredson. He describes his own research, in the third-person, as follows:

> 'He argues that the smaller average brain size of blacks is one factor responsible for their lower average intelligence … Lynn's book argues that eugenicists were right in their concerns about the genetic deterioration of modern populations and that conscious eugenic measures need to be taken to arrest and reverse these trends' (Lynn, 2001: 487 & 488).

A second co-author of the LCI defense, **Noah Carl,** has argued that racist stereotypes are 'informed by rational beliefs about the respective characteristics of those immigrant groups' (Carl, 2016: 4); and that:

> 'There is a large amount of evidence that groups differ in average cognitive ability. This is true for comparisons across nations, as well as comparisons across races within a country' (Carl, 2019: 262).

In 2019 Carl was briefly the subject of public debate about these views and he lost a research position at St Edmund's College, Cambridge. **Toby Young** defended him in an article claiming that Carl's 'only crime is being a conservative' (Young, 2019).

These writers are among a group connected by attendance at LCI, their authorship of the LCI defence paper, and links through publishing and reviewing in journals created specifically to provide a platform for writing on race and heredity. In addition to **'Mankind Quarterly'**, a new online 'journal', *OpenPsych,* was established by two LCI attendees **Emil O. W. Kirkegaard** and **Davide Piffer**. Kirkegaard has argued that 'Islamic countries have lower IQ' (Kirkegaard, 2014). *OpenPsych* is unusual in accepting anonymous manuscripts (cf. *OpenPsych,* 2019) and has been described as 'a central node in a dense network of race scientists who work to provide legitimacy and propaganda for the far-right … Of the top 15 *OpenPsych* contributors, 11 have written for *Mankind Quarterly* in the past three years. Of these, nine were also speakers at the *London Conference on Intelligence'* (Van Der Merwe, 2018).

OpenPsych is a key part of an 'hereditarian counterscience that is aiming to change the shape of legitimate academic discourse on race from its margins' (Panofsky et al., 2021: 395). The publishers of *Mankind Quarterly* include the **Pioneer Fund,** who also fund *American Renaissance* (Weyher, 2001: lv-lvi), a website dedicated to 'the study of all aspects of race, whether historical, cultural, or biological' (American Renaissance, 2021) and classed as a 'hate group' that 'promotes pseudo-scientific studies and research that purport to show the inferiority of blacks to whites' by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2022a). Several signatories to the 1994 WSJ article (including Jensen, Rushton and Lynn) have been published by *American Renaissance*, as have LCI contributors, including Carl (2020) and Lynn (2008).

ResearchED, Hereditarians and race pseudoscientists

> Sabisky first came to prominence with a talk at ResearchEd 2014 in which he asked why educators never talked about genetics. When we meet, he even uses the E word. "Eugenics are about selecting 'for' good things," he says. (McInerney, 2016).

'ResearchED' is an organisation, co-founded by **Tom Bennett**, that runs conferences, ostensibly aimed at teachers and school leaders, which claim to be research- and practice-focused. Bennett is a prominent figure in **DfE** policymaking: he is 'lead behaviour advisor to the Department', chair of a taskforce intended 'to tackle unruly behaviour in schools' (National College, 2021), and leads the £10million 'Behaviour Hubs programme' (Carr, 2021). Bennett describes ResearchED as: 'a grass-roots, teacher-led project that aims to make teachers research-literate and pseudo-science proof. Since 2013 researchED has grown from a tweet to an international conference movement that so far has spanned three continents and six countries' (ResearchED 2020a)

Applicants to speak at ResearchEd submit a photo and session description (75 words max); their suitability is decided by the conference organiser and Bennett himself (ResearchED 2022). Bennett's aim of creating 'research-literate and pseudo-science proof' teachers is somewhat at odds with the number of ResearchED presenters who advocate an hereditarian view of intelligence. **Sabisky** is credited as 'a writer and independent research worker' who has 'presented talks on intelligence, genetics, and testing at multiple researchEDs' (ResearchED, 2016: 32). Another frequent speaker is **David Didau.** As Benjamin Doxtdator (2019) has noted, one of Didau's books includes an appendix by Sabisky (2015) which states that Black/white intelligence gaps are 'due to variations in the innate qualities of persons and are not the result of manipulable differences in environments' (quoted in Doxtdator, 2019).

Didau returned to race and intelligence in a now deleted blog post. In answer to a reader's question, he replied:

> "Why do we see certain cultures doing much better (or worse) than others within the same education system."

> Well, firstly there's peer effects, and secondly – despite the unpopularity of discussing such things, there are fairly clear racial differences in IQ (quoted in Doxtdator, 2019).

When a reader challenged him for evidence to support this statement on race, Didau replied with a link to an article by **Gottfredson** that reproduces the *WSJ* piece signed by **Plomin, Jensen, Eysenck, Lynn** et al (Gottfredson, 1997). This is hugely significant: in 2017 Didau was promoting white supremacist race science about IQ on his blog. Tom Bennett [ResearchED co-founder] and Greg Ashman [head of ResearchED Australia] both supported Didau throughout the criticism on Twitter (Doxtdator, 2019).

Whereas Didau and Sabisky have made clear their belief in an inherent genetically-based Black intelligence deficit (though Didau deleted the evidence); other ResearchED hereditarian presenters have been more circumspect. Two of Plomin's co-authors, **Kathryn Asbury** and **Stuart Ritchie**, have given sessions at ResearchED – all focused on genetics and/or intelligence. Ritchie has not stated a clear view on race and intelligence because, he says, the field is 'so toxic and scandal-prone' that too little high-quality research currently exists (2015: 92). Nevertheless, he rejects the idea that IQ research is racist because 'Facts don't have moral values attached' (Ritchie, 2015: 105) and publicly thanked Sabisky for 'extremely useful comments on earlier drafts' of his book (p. 5).[4] Another ResearchED presenter with passionate hereditarian views is **Jamie Martin**. Martin's details no longer appear on the ResearchED website but an archived version of his entry confirms his session details and credits him as a past advisor in the **DfE** (ResearchEd, 2020b). Writing in the *TES*, Martin cites Plomin as a key source on 'inherent general intelligence (IQ)' and states:

> Questioning the validity of IQ tests or intelligence, says Stuart Ritchie of the University of Edinburgh, author of *Intelligence: all that matters*, is akin to climate change denial or thinking that vaccines cause autism. (Martin, 2016: 22).

ResearchED conferences enjoy extraordinary support from the **DfE** and **Ofsted** (Office for Standards in Education – independent inspectorate of schools for England). Past ResearchEd speakers have included **Michael Gove** (then Secretary of State for Education), **Nick Gibb** (when Minister of State for School Standards), **Nicky Morgan** (past Secretary of State for Education), **Tim Leunig** (chief analyst and chief scientific adviser at DfE), **Emma Hewlett** (Behavioural Insights Adviser, DfE), **Andrew Knight** (Head of Education Lab, DfE), **Amanda Spielman** (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, Ofsted – spoke at two national conferences), **Sean Harford** (Ofsted's National Director, Education), **Heather Fearn** (Ofsted Inspector Curriculum and Development Lead), and **Daniel Muijs** (Ofsted Head of Research).

Some ResearchED participants, therefore, advocate for hereditarianism (Asbury, Ritchie, Martin), others are on record supporting race pseudoscience (Didau, Sabisky). Alongside this, ResearchEd conferences have featured several speakers who are antagonistic to progressive education in general, and antiracism in particular. These speakers feature in a related, and interconnected network that we examine next.

5. The anti-antiracists

> *We refuse to be divided—by racists or culture warriors—who refuse to see us as individuals beyond our skin colour …* We must oppose and expose the racial division being sown in the name of anti-racism. (Don't Divide Us, 2021. original emphasis)

The individuals and groups that we name 'the anti-antiracists' present themselves as principled defenders of justice who dare to oppose a tyranny of 'woke' ideologues who sow division, see racism *everywhere*, refuse to consider any other issues in any way, and divide the world into two groups; whites (whom they view as uniformly powerful and oppressive) and non-whites (who are powerless victims denied any agency or free will). This caricature of antiracism is repeated incessantly (see Warmington, 2015) and amplified by high-profile organisations (including think-tanks and campaigning groups) whose funding is secret but whose presence in political and media discourse is highly visible and influential. Many of the key players are close to the centre of political power, some appointed to key policy (advisory and/or regulatory) positions.

Don't divide us – Equiano project - counterweight

'**Don't Divide Us**' (DDU) is one of several campaigning organisations that appeared in 2020, arguing against a focus on white racism in politics in general and education in particular. The timing is significant because the groups offered a counter-narrative (often voiced by conservative speakers of colour) against the growing profile of antiracist protests energized by the murder of George Floyd, in May 2020 in the USA, leading to a resurgence in international protests for race equity as part of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement.

DDU's Twitter account opened in June 2020 (@DontDivideUsNow). The following month another new pressure group, **The Equiano Project** [EP] began tweeting along similar lines (@EquianoProject). Writing in the conservative *Daily Mail* – one of the UK's highest circulation newspapers and one of its most politically influential[5] - EP's founder, **Inaya Folarin Iman** (**DDU** signatory and a columnist at the libertarian website *Spiked*) stated:

> Imported from America, this toxic ideology [Black Lives Matter] sees everything through the prism of race, based on a narrative where black people are the permanent victims of oppression, while white people are collectively guilty of perpetuating discrimination … That is why I have established a new movement — The Equiano Project — in order to present an alternative vision; one that embodies the positive values of freedom, openness and dialogue rather than the relentlessly negative soundtrack of bullying, grievance and antagonism. (Iman, 2020)

A few months later a third new pressure group appeared, called '**Counterweight**'. Once again, the founder, **Helen Pluckrose**, was a **DDU** signatory and, like DDU, the group's origins are presented as a fight back against the race-conscious actions inspired by the

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[4] Our thanks to Alan Leyin for bringing this to our attention.

[5] The Mail is consistently at or near the top of the circulation data and enjoys unparalleled influence among policymakers of all parties (cf. Gillborn 2020).

murder of George Floyd (Counterweight, 2020). Pluckrose is especially animated about Critical Race Theory (CRT). Her book '*Cynical theories*' (Pluckrose & Lindsey, 2020) devotes considerable space to the approach and she celebrated President Trump's ban on CRT in Federal training;

> This cynical and pessimistic materialist approach tends to present empirical evidence of disparities and then claim racism as the sole cause of them, while ignoring progress … By banning training rooted in critical race theory for federal employees, President Trump has defended freedom of belief and taken a stand against coerced speech. (Pluckrose, 2020).

The sudden creation of vocal, high-profile groups – that denounce race-conscious theory and reform - serves several functions. By attaching grand-sounding names to pressure groups that share many key personnel, the different groups *appear* to represent different constituencies, all energized by the supposed danger of antiracism. Additionally, the groups' outward profile serves an 'astroturf' function, i.e. artificially claiming a grass-roots character that does not accurately reflect the degree of top-down coordination and strategy behind the scenes. For example, Inaya Folarin Iman's self-proclaimed 'movement', EP, boasted just two members on its launch; Iman and a 'project manager' (Equiano Project, 2021). Each of these groups display prominent 'donate' options on their websites but none publish their income or source/s of funding.

'Free speech' versus antiracism

Don't Divide Us, Equiano and *Counterweight* all have strong ties to the **Free Speech Union** (FSU), set up, in 2019, by **Toby Young** - a key player in the IQist network. *DDU* and *Counterweight* formally cite FSU as a 'partner' on their websites and *EP* founder, **Iman,** is listed as a Founding Director of FSU. Iman also launched yet another new group, '*Free Speech Champions*' (FSC), which credits its existence to both *FSU* (run by Young) and *the Battle of Ideas* (run by Claire Fox – another DDU signatory, who was elevated to the House of Lords in 2020 by the Johnson government) (FSC, Free Speech Champions, 2022). In 2021, several young people left the FSC, complaining that Iman directed key decisions regardless of students' wishes and that they were 'censured if they disagreed with the group's right-of-centre orthodoxy' (Ahmed, 2021).

The FSU 'Advisory Council' (Free Speech Union, 2021) includes **Robert Plomin** (a major figure in the IQist network) and several people with a high-profile in debates about the supposed failings of 'multiculturalism' and antiracism', including:

> **David Goodhart:** Head of Demography, Immigration & Integration at Policy Exchange (2021b). Has argued that Britain is 'too diverse' – 'most of us prefer our own kind' (Goodhart, 2004). In 2020 Goodhart was appointed as a new Commissioner at the **Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)**, the non-departmental public body with responsibility for enforcing equality laws.
> **David Green**: founder of the think-tank **Civitas**: described the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson, 1999) as 'more like a kangaroo court than a judicial process' (Green 2000: 40-1).
> **Eric Kaufmann**: 'Senior Fellow' at **Policy Exchange,** has written about the danger of accusing white people of racism and argued that it is not racist for white people to defend their *ethnic self-interest* (Kaufmann, 2017 and 2019).
> **Joanna Williams:** author of a book on the evils of CRT (Williams, 2021), presenter at two **ResearchED** national conferences, a columnist at *Spiked*, Director of the Freedom, Democracy and Victimhood Project at **Civitas** (Civitas, 2022) and Head of Education and Culture at **Policy Exchange** (Policy Exchange, 2022).

It is no coincidence that the FSU, an organisation championing a partial and dogmatic version of 'free speech', should boast so many anti-antiracists on its advisory board. Internationally, and especially in the US and UK, 'freedom of speech' has become a trope in the assault on progressive politics in general, and antiracism in particular:

> Freedom of speech, as it is currently understood in practices of media balance, ideologies of open debate and demands for a unitary public, functions as a structure of racialized coercion. The idea of 'free speech' is being used to discipline expression, demand conformity, and reanimate racist discourses as markers of free thinking and expression'. (Titley, 2020: 137)

Intervention in policy and practice

These anti-antiracist organisations (FSU, DDU, EP, Counterweight) not only act as campaigning bodies; they also pursue an actively interventionist agenda. DDU provides several form letters and guides for people to use if they wish to complain about antiracist activities at a school, university or workplace. These combine alarmist attacks on antiracism alongside coded reminders of legal frameworks which may, or may not, have relevance. For example, DDU's '*Guide for Parents on Schools, CRT & Political Impartiality*' quotes directly from several legal instruments including the Education Act 1996, the Education Act 2002, and the European Court of Human Rights. DDU and EP supply speakers who will visit schools to provide 'different views on race' (DDU, 2021). DDU signatories also write for other outlets, often celebrating the group's efforts. **Calvin Robinson**, for example, is a DDU signatory; past advisor for the **DfE** (Robinson, 2022); **ResearchED** speaker (in 2018 he spoke on '*Addressing political bias in education*'), and writes for high circulation right-wing newspapers (*The Telegraph, Daily Mail, The Sun*). He is Senior Fellow (responsible for Education Policy) at **Policy Exchange** (Policy Exchange, 2021a).

Robinson's link to the **Policy Exchange** think tank is common with many anti-antiracists (including **Goodhart, Kaufmann**, and **Williams**). Policy Exchange personnel also include two of the most influential anti-antiracist figures in English politics, **Munira Mirza** and **Tony Sewell** – writers who (like Robinson, Iman and Phillips) explicitly cite their own minority ethnic heritage as bestowing additional weight to their claims that racism is not the problem that progressives claim (cf. Warmington, 2015). As Director of the Number 10 Policy Unit (until 2022), **Munira Mirza** was at the very centre of policy-making in Johnson's government. Mirza worked as 'Development Director' at **Policy Exchange** (Policy Exchange, 2021c) before working with Johnson (as Deputy Mayor for Education and Culture) when he was Mayor of London. In 2010 Mirza made headlines when she edited a special issue of *Prospect* magazine (founded by **Goodhart**). Her introduction set the tone by stating that 'Race is no longer the significant disadvantage it is often portrayed to be' (Mirza, 2010). The same line was adopted by **Sewell** in his contribution, arguing that institutional racism was an overblown idea that allowed Black people (children, parents and academics) to play the victim and avoid personal responsibility:

> 'What we now see in schools is children undermined by poor parenting, peer-group pressure and an inability to be responsible for their own behaviour. They are not subjects of institutional racism. They have failed their GCSEs because they did not do the homework, did not pay attention and were disrespectful to their teachers. (Sewell, 2010: 33)

Anti-antiracists such as Sewell often decry antiracist positions in the UK as being over-influenced by US experiences. However, it is worth noting the extent to which Sewell's claims draw on the established US 'conservative behaviorist' discourse described by West, 1992, wherein 'subtle historical and sociological analysis of …job and residential discrimination, skewed unemployment rates, inadequate healthcare, and poor education' in communities of colour is supplanted by a conservative emphasis on 'the behavioral impediments to black upward mobility …the waning of the Protestant ethic – hard work, deferred gratification' (West, 1992: 37).

Sewell joined Policy Exchange in 2017. In the midst of the large-scale BLM protests, in June 2020, Johnson announced that a Commission would be established to 'change the narrative, so we stop the sense of victimization and discrimination' (BBC News, 2020). Mirza was reportedly charged with putting together the Commission, which drew criticism in light of her anti-antiracist track record (Murphy & Siddique, 2020). Distrust of the **'Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities'** (CRED) grew even louder when Sewell was announced as its chair. **Mercy Muroki,** a **DDU** signatory, was also appointed to the Commission. Described on the CRED website as 'a social policy researcher, commentator, and columnist' (GOV.UK, 2022), (like Sewell) her previous writing confirmed a clear anti-antiracist stance:

Whining about white privilege ruins constructive debate on racial tensions (Muroki, 2020)

Disadvantaged kids are held back by the politics of class and victimhood (Muroki, 2019)

Published in March 2021, the **Sewell Report** (CRED, 2021) delivered on Johnson's desire to 'change the narrative'. The report downplayed racism as an issue (finding no evidence of institutional racism), and argued that other matters are much more significant:

> Put simply we no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities. The impediments and disparities do exist, they are varied, and ironically very few of them are directly to do with racism. Too often 'racism' is the catch-all explanation, and can be simply implicitly accepted rather than explicitly examined. The evidence shows that geography, family influence, socio-economic background, culture and religion have more significant impact on life chances than the existence of racism. (CRED, 2021: 8).

The CRED report was widely disparaged by experts in numerous fields, with highly critical statements published by the *British Medical Journal* (Razai et al, 2021)*,* health expert Marmot (2021), the British Psychological Society (2021) and the United Nations (2021). Historian David Olusoga described the report as 'government-funded whataboutery stretched over 258 pages' and noted that 'just about every leading writer and commentator on race and racism in the UK has criticised the report's findings and challenged its methodology' (Olusoga, 2021). In stark contrast the government welcomed the report and dismissed all criticism:

> This Government welcome legitimate disagreement and debate, but firmly reject bad-faith attempts to undermine the credibility of this report … Regarding the statement by the UN experts, the group grossly misrepresented the commission's report; the statement is clearly born of the divisive narratives perpetrated by certain media outlets and political groups that are seeking to sow division in our ethnic minority communities. (Kemi Badenoch, Equalities Minister, *Hansard,* 2021)

The level of daily exposure for anti-antiracist views increased markedly in 2021 with the launch of **GB News** – a free-to-view cable TV news channel that explicitly positioned itself as the right-wing alternative to the mainstream media (Keens, 2021): Iman, Muroki and Robinson – all DDU signatories – were employed as presenters.

6. The authoritarian educators

> Katharine Birbalsingh, the principal or "headmistress" who founded Michaela [School] … says the school's emphasis on order and discipline means that "children can be children here, and have real childhoods." … just like the military the school has established its own vernacular. "SLANT!" a teacher will shout, and students are expected to sit bolt upright, arms crossed, face turned to the front ... new pupils joining the school at 11 years old are expected to attend a seven-day bootcamp before term starts. "That's where we learn how strictness is good for you," one pupil tells me, "how we're different from other schools." "Everything is in control," another child adds, with a smile. (Carr, 2018)

London's Michaela Community School and its headteacher, **Katherine Birbalsingh** (who in February 2022 was featured on the front cover of *The Times* as 'Britain's strictest teacher'), enjoy an international profile: the quotation above is from *Time* magazine. Birbalsingh rose to national attention following her appearance at the 2010 Conservative Party Conference. She earned a standing ovation for a speech describing the 'broken' education system and attacked antiracism:

> 'Black underachievement is due in part to the chaos of our classrooms, and in part to the accusation of racism. If you keep telling teachers that they're racist for trying to discipline Black boys, and if you keep telling heads that they're racist for trying to exclude Black boys, in the end the schools stop reprimanding these children. … Black children underachieve because of what the well-meaning liberal does to him.' (Birbalsingh, 2010).

Right from the start, therefore, Birbalsingh – and those who support and promote her – have relied on a message of discipline and control that is both universal and deeply racialized. State school students are portrayed as a potentially feral and disconnected threat; all that can save them, and society, is discipline (Hobson, 2021). The then-Education Secretary, **Michael Gove**, joined in Birbalsingh's standing ovation and a year after her conference speech, she co-founded a 'Free School' (receiving state funding – from Gove's **DfE** - but operating independently of the local authority). **Toby Young** – who led his own Free School – has been a prominent supporter for Birbalsingh and described Michaela as a 'miracle' (Young, 2016).

Michaela opened in 2014. Birbalsingh's partner as co-founder, **Suella Braverman**, was appointed Attorney General by prime minister Johnson in 2020 – a cabinet position and the government's senior legal adviser. In 2021 Birbalsingh was appointed chair of the Government's **Social Mobility Commission**, meant to promote 'the social mobility agenda: holding to account and challenging key institutions in areas such as higher education' (GOV.UK, 2022).

A founding **DDU** signatory, Birbalsingh advocates the central tropes of anti-antiracism (discussed above); she does not deny the existence of racism *per se*, but she attacks antiracists as self-serving politically motivated troublemakers. She has told her 79,300 twitter followers that 'anti-racists are the most racist of all' (19 February 2021):

> Alternative to anti-racism?
> Strive to be a GOOD person instead
> (Katherine Birbalsingh, @Miss_Snuffy, 8 December 2020)

And for anyone in doubt about how accusations of racism are dealt with in her own school:

> If child says teacher is being racist, back the teacher.
> Whatever the child says, back the teacher.
> If you don't, you are letting the child down and allowing them to play you for a fool.
> (Katherine Birbalsingh, @Miss_Snuffy, 10 November 2019)

Birbalsingh is feted as a model educator by many of the people and organizations already mentioned in this analysis, including **Tom Bennett** (ResearchED founder). Birbalsingh has addressed **ResearchEd** conferences on at least two occasions, including a keynote (ResearchEd, 2018) and a panel appearance entitled *Good classroom management isn't violence* (ResearchEd, 2017). Bennett interviewed Birbalsingh as part of the launch of a book celebrating her philosophy (Birbalsingh, 2020; PLMR, 2020). As David Buckingham has noted, the two share a conviction that, prior to the 2010 election, progressive educators had destroyed standards in state schools, failed their students and generated chaos because of their fear of 'oppressing' (Buckingham, 2020). Although this might sound ridiculously over-blown, it is an accurate representation of the worldview for which Bennett and Birbalsingh are key cheerleaders. And it is an influential view; Bennett is the specialist advisor to the **DfE** on behaviour and authored the government's 'independent review' of behaviour in schools which stated:

> Directing students to behave in a specific way is often mischaracterised as an act of oppression. This is both unhelpful and untrue. It is the duty of every adult to help create in students the habit of self-restraint or self-regulation. This must be mastered before students can consider themselves to be truly free. (Bennett, 2017: 23)

Bennett offers no reference to support his claim that *anyone* has *ever* described '[d]irecting students to behave in a specific way' as 'oppression'. But the rhetoric does not need evidence - ironic in an approach that demands a curriculum saturated with 'facts' and chronology - the authoritarian educators' perspective thrives on false dichotomies and hyperbole; where the chosen educators are righteous liberators of children who would otherwise be sacrificed to political correctness and 'progressive' dogma:

> The Michaela Way is a 'zero tolerance' regime: no talking is allowed in the corridors, lateness is not tolerated, and there is extensive use of detentions. … The Michaela Way also has its own mantras. Key terms like authority, responsibility, duty, values, and knowledge recur throughout [Birbalsingh's] book. One chapter is baldly entitled 'we believe in authority', while elsewhere we learn that 'self-discipline is an act of freedom' (Buckingham, 2020)

Michaela teachers are a recurring presence at ResearchED conferences (2016-19). Birbalsingh and Bennett's views on the importance of rigid discipline and a traditional curriculum is echoed by the organisation '**Parents and Teachers for Excellence**' (PTE). PTE states that:

Looking at the best schools in the country – in the state and private sector – they tend to have a number of key characteristics in common:

–The highest standards of behaviour are expected in the classroom and around the school.

–They teach a challenging curriculum that stresses the importance of knowledge.

–Children are tested regularly so their progress can be measured and teaching amended accordingly.' (PTE, 2022)

PTE was founded in 2016 by **Jon Moynihan** (a venture capitalist and board member for *Vote Leave*) and **Dame Rachel de Souza**, then chief executive of an academy trust (Dickens, 2016). PTE announced itself as a '[s]trictly non-partisan' campaign advocating four 'core principles':

promoting knowledge-based curricula that emphasise extensive subject knowledge; the benefits of regular, rigorous assessment throughout pupils' school lives; promoting enrichment through a longer school day; and the need for effective behaviour policies. It is these principles that are best able to raise standards in our schools. (PTE, 2016)

PTE's first 'advisory council' included **Tom Bennett, Munira Mirza, Tony Sewell** and **Rachel Wolf** (listed as 'Founder of The New Schools Network & Former Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for Education'). Wolf has strong ties to **Boris Johnson**, having been an advisor when he was Shadow Higher Education Minister, worked with his successful London Mayoral campaign, and co-authored the Conservative Party election manifesto in 2019 (which returned Johnson as PM). Wolf is also a founding partner at *Public First*, a polling company (Public First, 2021). In 2021 the High Court ruled that a Cabinet Office contract with *Public First*, worth £560,000, 'gave rise to apparent bias and was unlawful' (Conn, 2021).

PTE are especially vocal about discipline. In September 2018, while the **Timpson** independent review of exclusions was underway, the group issued a statement is support of the status quo:

Excluding a child from school is a last resort, and done with the interests of the pupil concerned, and others, at heart. To ignore poor behaviour in order to artificially reduce the number of exclusions would be illogical and unfair, and ultimately teachers and vulnerable pupils would suffer the most (PTE, 2018).

Among the signatories are Rachel de Souza, Tom Bennett, Munira Mirza and Tony Sewell. Bennett's inclusion is especially significant because he was a member of the 'expert reference group' whom Timpson said 'helped to shape' his review (Timpson, 2019: 111). **The Timpson Review**, like the later CRED report, was widely condemned for what appeared to be a deliberate downplaying of race inequity as an issue: a letter to the prime minister (signed by 20 race equality organisations) noted that the review makes 'repeated attempts to explain away rather than acknowledge racial disparity' (CORE, 2019).

Exclusions was a particular concern for de Souza since the academy trust that she ran at the time, Inspiration Trust, included several schools with relatively high exclusion rates, not least Great Yarmouth Primary Academy which 'permanently excluded more children in a single year than any primary school on record' (Mansell, 2020).

In 2021, de Souza was appointed **Children's Commissioner for England,** the independent voice for children's rights and interests. The appointment was made by Johnson's government despite an uncomfortable appearance in front of the Education Select Committee, where de Souza refused to offer a clear view on the use of physical punishment by parents/carers against children. Asked whether she believed the legal defence of 'reasonable punishment' should be removed in England (as in Scotland and Wales), she replied 'I would need to look into this properly'; prompting one committee member to comment:

'What kind of rights champion for children doesn't have a view on whether the law should allow them to be hit?' (Weale & Quinn, 2020).

De Souza's reticence on physical punishment is strange in view of the fact that the organisation that she founded, PTE, has devoted a lot of time and thought to its stance on discipline, describing its philosophy as *'warm/strict'*:

Great Warm/Strict schools ensure there are clear structures for pupils and staff to thrive within. Rules and routines are made explicit, so everyone understands what the rules are and why they exist: to enable pupils to be the best version of themselves all day, every day (PTE, 2021).

Warm/Strict embodies a 'no excuses' approach that echoes US 'zero tolerance' techniques, long known to discriminate (in practice if not intent) against Black students (Kulz, 2019; Skiba et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2020):

'No excuses' means that there is never any need to argue with the child about 'why' something has happened, or whether a sanction is deserved or not; when an infraction happens, for whatever reason, sanctions are automatic and aren't argued over (PTE, 2021).

This philosophy is consciously linked to Birbalsingh/Michaela, asserting with messianic zeal:

'it's not just Michaela, it's a movement. And ultimately hundreds of thousands of children are going to have their lives transformed for the better because of it. What an amazing time to be in schools!' (Lehain, 2019)

7. Concluding discussion

We began this paper by suggesting that the term 'chumocracy' is too facile to capture the scale and active influence of right-wing networks on contemporary government policy in England, and their movement from the fringes to the centre of policy. An over-emphasis on *old-boys'-club* type connections obscures both the powerful ideological affinities that produce these networks and the workings by which mobilities of actors and ideas enable these networks to interpenetrate each other and public and governmental institutions. Our concern in this paper is with the demonstrable influence of an intellectual flow that has rehabilitated aspects of pseudoscientific racism, authoritarian approaches to schooling and nativism. This intellectual flow, we argue, has been facilitated by interconnections between three conservative tendencies that share an ideological commitment to 'changing the narrative' on race, education and other fields of social policy by delegitimising analysis of structural racism and characterising Black and working-class young people, and their communities, as socially disruptive and culturally deficient. We refer to these overlapping networks as IQists, Anti-Antiracists and Authoritarian Educators.

Across these three mutually entangled networks we see a flow of ideas around race and education that in a certain sense are distinct. We can separately account for the race pseudoscientists' view of Black people as genetically pre-disposed to having less intelligence than white people; or the anti-antiracists' strategic colour-blindness that depicts accounts of structural racism as divisive; and the authoritarian educators' view that Black and working-class young people require highly restrictive school regimes. However, in practice these entangled networks borrow tactics, language and policy 'solutions' from each other to an extent that it becomes difficult to disentangle their concerns; their affinities result in connections and relations that cannot easily be separated.

Over the past decade the recurrence of think tank activity, conferences and journals has supported their repetition of often extreme ideas about race, intelligence, culture and authority, providing them with credibility and mechanisms for objectivating these ideas in education policy. The extent to which government hierarchies have become amenable to the influence of these networks is apparent in purposeful action that includes both new capacities actualised through network relations and the redirection of existing personal or organisational capacity and capitals. Actors who have moved within these highly influential networks have come to shape policy both in the political spotlight (Johnson, Gove) and behind the scenes through, for example, the Department for Education. In recent years the networks have also captured several key posts as advocates or board members in organisations that are supposed to hold government to account and advance equity and social justice. These include the Office of the Children's Commissioner (de Souza); the Social Mobility Commission (SMC) (Birbalsingh); Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (Goodhart); and ostensibly independent inquiries into school exclusions (Timpson) and race inequity (Sewell, Muroki).

Gillborn (2008) examined the 'conspiratorial' nature of state and institutional racism, noting that conspiracy did not require centrally organised activity but more often worked in ways more akin to hub and spoke modes. This has some overlap with the post-bureaucratic intellectual flow we describe in this paper, wherein ideas, logic and representation are capable of transgressing boundaries of sector and institution. The circulation of IQist, authoritarian and anti-antiracist logics and ideas is not (necessarily) produced by hierarchical coercion; it is more likely to develop on a horizontal plane of affective connections, via 'sympathy' and 'affinity' between actors. However, as 'chumocratic' appointments to bodies such as the EHRC and SMC indicate, the notion of flows encompasses mobilities across the boundaries of government in terms of ideas but also in terms of people. Their networking activity simultaneously supports populist, reactionary politics and is accelerated by it as their ideas and their members cut across, and to a degree blur, the boundaries of governmental and civic domains.

In short, these conservative networks remain relatively diffuse, in that they are distributed across domains, across sectors and institutions; however, they are relatively cohesive insofar as they identify with a shared logic and values: principally the need to erase structural, race-conscious analysis from educational and social policy and turn back forms of social liberalism and economic redistribution that constrain the dominance of racialised and authoritarian neoliberalism - or neoliberal racism.

Central to these shared values is a common sense of the policy problem. We have defined this as a problem of how to reproduce white supremacy and, in particular, the need to embrace the fluidity necessary to block progressive, antiracist change. In his historical analysis of the global emergence of populist politics over the past century, Judis (2016) makes a distinction between the ways in which left populism and right populism define 'the problem' in policy and politics. He argues that left-wing populists encourage a vertical and 'dyadic' worldview, wherein 'the people' are engaged in struggle against 'the elite'. In contrast, right-wing populism is 'triadic', in that it purports to represent 'the people' against an elite that has neglected the masses by favouring a third group, usually a racialised minority. In contemporary English policy discourse, the shared problems confronting education are named repeatedly as 'social liberalism', 'antiracism' and 'wokeness' that have created a space in which political energies have supposedly been misdirected towards indulging particular fractions of the school population: *undeserving* Black and working-class young people. The active structuring of racial inequality through policy requires that political energies shift away from addressing these young people's problems and that Black and working-class youth are located as the problem, exiled from the centre to the fringes. Such is the effect of the networks we describe, to constitute new governmental capacity to resist progressive change - delegitimising critique of structural racism, eliding race inequity, and promoting deeply racialised enterprises of curricular control and strict discipline - and in so doing to reproduce white supremacy. Fig. 1

Fig. 1. English Education Policy Network Governance: IQists, Anti-Antiracists and Authoritarian Educators

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