



DPO Sector

Insights

THE FUTURE OF DPO DEVELOPMENT

R Edwards, DPO Development Manager

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Executive Summary

This report comprehensively analyses the "DPO Insights: The Future of DPO Development" initiative, led by Disability Rights UK and funded by the Legal Education Foundation.

The DPO Capacity Building project, now at a critical juncture, has achieved significant milestones in supporting and empowering the Disabled People's Organisations (DPO) sector across the UK.

The following report summarises the outcomes from five future planning sessions with DPOs across the UK. These engagements provided invaluable insights into the sector's needs and strategic directions for the project's next phase.

1. Introduction

The DPO Capacity Building Project is a three-year initiative funded by the Legal Education Fund that focuses on enhancing the capacities of DPOs, developing the sector, and embedding intersectionality into the Disability Rights movement.

DPO Insights: The Future of DPO Development marks a pivotal moment in the project's journey. Two years in, we must continue incorporating feedback from within the DPO sector to guide its future direction and enhance its impact.

As we plan for the next three years, our priority is to co-produce a future that reflects the real needs, aspirations, and demands of DPOs across the UK. This approach is not just a strategic choice—it is Disability Rights UK's fundamental commitment to ensure that our work is directly informed by the voices of those on the front lines of the disability rights movement.

Why DPO Development?

DPOs are the cornerstone of the Disability Rights Movement, providing the authentic voice and representation of disabled people. In an environment marked by increased competition for funding, escalating service demands, and the ever-present challenge of disablist policies, the need for focused development and capacity-building initiatives is more urgent than ever¹.

Our sector faces formidable obstacles, including a heightened need for services, systemic ableism across the UK, inaccessible funding and systemic support for non-representative organisations that claim to speak on behalf of the disabled community. In this context, our movement's resilience is tested, and the need for change is undeniable.

The DPO Capacity Building Project So far

The DPO Capacity Building Project has made significant strides in reinforcing the foundational importance of representation. By delivering targeted training, providing essential resources, and fostering meaningful connections, we have empowered DPOs to support our diverse community, target funding injustice, and collectively challenge the growing threats to human rights in the UK.

Yet, our understanding of the DPO sector and the broader disability justice movement has grown as the challenges and opportunities facing DPOs in 2024 and 2025 have changed. The political and social landscape is shifting, and with it, so are the needs and priorities of DPO Development.

Goals.

By gathering insights directly from DPOs through drop-in sessions, consultations with key regional DPOs, and ongoing discussions with our steering board, we aim to ensure that the next iteration of our work is as responsive, inclusive, and impactful as possible.

2. Methodology

The research utilised a participatory approach, engaging stakeholders through two Zoom sessions open to the sector, which followed two targeted sessions with the project steering board. Further insights were obtained through targeted consultations with key regional DPOs. The methodology ensured diverse perspectives were captured, reflecting the needs of national and regional DPO players.

In the starting sessions, steering board members, who have led the project's direction for the last two years, proposed future priorities, structures, and objectives for a project funded from 2025-2028. Disability Rights UK then accumulated these directives, which became foundational conversation points in two open sessions in the DPO sector and one targeted consultation with key regional DPOs: Inclusion London and Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People.

Session Structure:

In all sessions, DPO Participants were debriefed on the actions of the capacity building project between 2022 and 2024, the discussion of the group beforehand and asked the following questions:

- 1. How will this project be structured to align with the DPO Sector?**
 - a. Will the project continue to be centralised, delivering capacity-building and development initiatives from Disability Rights UK, or should it be decentralised across the sector through joint funding, etc.?
 - b. How will the project reflect Disability Rights UK's wider mandate from the DPO Sector?

- c. How will the project position itself among the DPO national network, DPO Forum England, and its actions?
- 2. Intersectionality became a large mandate of the DPO Capacity Building Project 2022-2025. Shall we continue to embed intersectionality into 2025-2028 or create a separate project to support it in the movement?**
- 3. What should be the priority development areas of the 2022-2025 project?**
 - a. Our previous priorities were (1) Training, (2) Promotion, and (3) Connectivity. Shall we continue to target these areas or prioritise other sections?

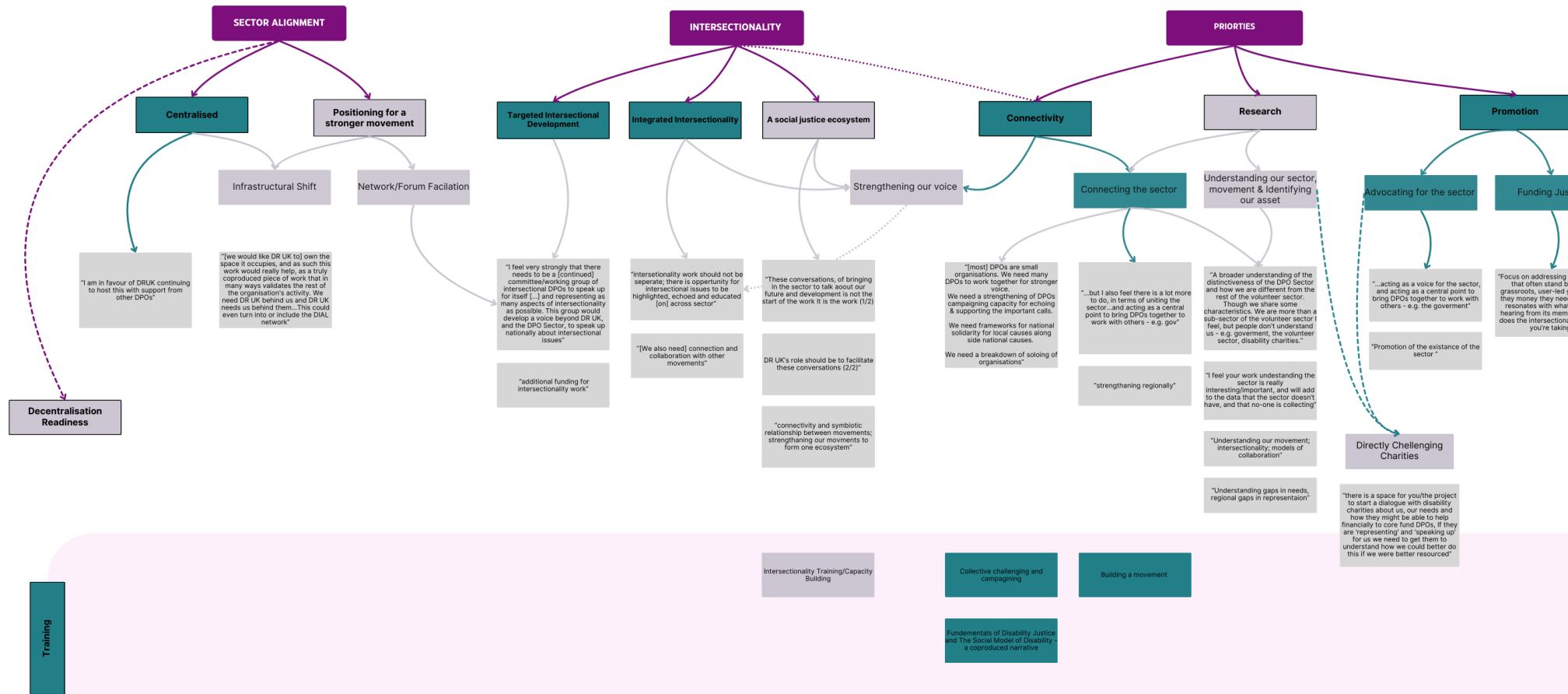
A Miro board was used live in sessions to note down the insights of DPO members.

After all sessions, Transcripts, Notes and a Live Miro Board were collected as data and organised into categories based on the above questions.

3. Findings from the Future Planning Sessions

The findings from the Insights Sessions were organised into categories based on the questions mentioned above. A visual graphic of the insights is on page 7, and a written summary is on page 8.

Sector Insights



Sector Alignment

Participants generally agreed that a decentralised DPO development project would be the optimal structure for ensuring the sustainability of a diverse sector. However, there was a unanimous consensus that the sector is not yet equipped to implement this model fully. As such, participants recommended maintaining a *Centralised* approach led by Disability Rights UK, with a strong emphasis on coproduction at the heart of the project. They also suggested dedicating some resources to exploring how the sector might eventually transition to decentralised capacity-building and development initiatives.

Participants highlighted the importance of Disability Rights UK using the project to assume an *Infrastructural Role* focused on supporting, uplifting, and showcasing the sector.

While there was no unanimous agreement on the project's role within the DPO Forum England, participants emphasised the project explore how the forum can address other sector priorities and serve as a platform for building a *Stronger Movement* - particularly in the areas of Disability Justice, cross-movement collaboration, and coordinated campaigning.

Intersectionality

There was strong agreement across the sector that intersectionality should remain a key priority of the DPO Capacity Building Project. The expertise of project managers in disability justice and intersectionality was specifically recognised as a valuable asset.

Intersectionality was seen as essential for advancing the DPO sector and connecting the disability rights movement with other social justice movements. Therefore, participants stressed the importance of *Integrating intersectionality* into DPO development as a core principle rather than treating it as a separate workflow.

However, participants also acknowledged the need for *Targeted Intersectional Development* to support intersectional DPOs, which are

often the most marginalised within the sector. They emphasised that dedicated resources should be equitably distributed to ensure these organisations can achieve their goals. Several participants mentioned needing a committee of intersectional DPOs or the Intersectional DPO Forum to receive financial support.

In discussions about intersectionality and sector connectivity, participants stressed the need to create a *Social Justice Ecosystem* as part of the project. This ecosystem would coordinate efforts to amplify the sector's political voice and foster symbiotic relationships with other social movements, moving beyond siloed approaches.

Participants viewed this work as complementary to bringing the sector together to plan its development, resolve conflict, codesign justice initiatives (including Funding Justice), and collectively progress the next wave of the movement.

Hence, the need for *Disability Justice*² was recognised - not merely to train DPOs on topics like intersectionality but to convene the Disability movement and establish mechanisms for sustaining a connected, symbiotic ecosystem that prioritises intersectional voices and solidarity both between DPOs and movements.

Priorities

Connectivity:

Connectivity was a key theme, particularly in the context of intersectionality and the creation of a social justice ecosystem. Participants also emphasised the importance of continuing to connect the sector, resolving friction and strengthening regional coordination.

Research:

Participants identified research as a new priority for the period 2025 to 2028. They expressed the need to answer vital questions about the sector through empirical methods. This research would explore topics such as the distinctiveness of the DPO sector compared to the broader voluntary sector, the costs associated with DPOs versus disability

charities, understanding the movement's dynamics, defining concepts like Disability Justice and Intersectionality, the social model of disability, and identifying regional gaps. Such research was seen as essential, not only for guiding DPO development, but also for providing evidence to support campaigns against funding injustices and in funding applications.

Promotion:

There was a strong consensus that disability charities led by non-disabled people continue to pose a significant challenge to the survival of the DPO sector. Challenging the poor representation of disabled people by these organisations was viewed as a core aspect of promotion efforts. Therefore, participants emphasised the importance of continuing the "*Funding Justice for DPOs*" campaign, which targets the injustice of funding non-disabled-led organisations to perform disability work and promotes accessible funding schemes across the trust and grant-giving sectors. Additionally, promoting the existence and role of the DPO sector within the broader disability movement was seen as a key priority for the project.

Training

While training was universally acknowledged as a core asset of development and capacity-building within the project, participants emphasised the importance of evolving beyond traditional training models. The new project should develop a training system that aligns with and supports the success of the sector's priorities. For instance, training on collective action, campaigning, and advocacy was seen as essential for fostering the development of a social justice ecosystem. Similarly, training on intersectionality was considered crucial to embedding this principle across the sector.

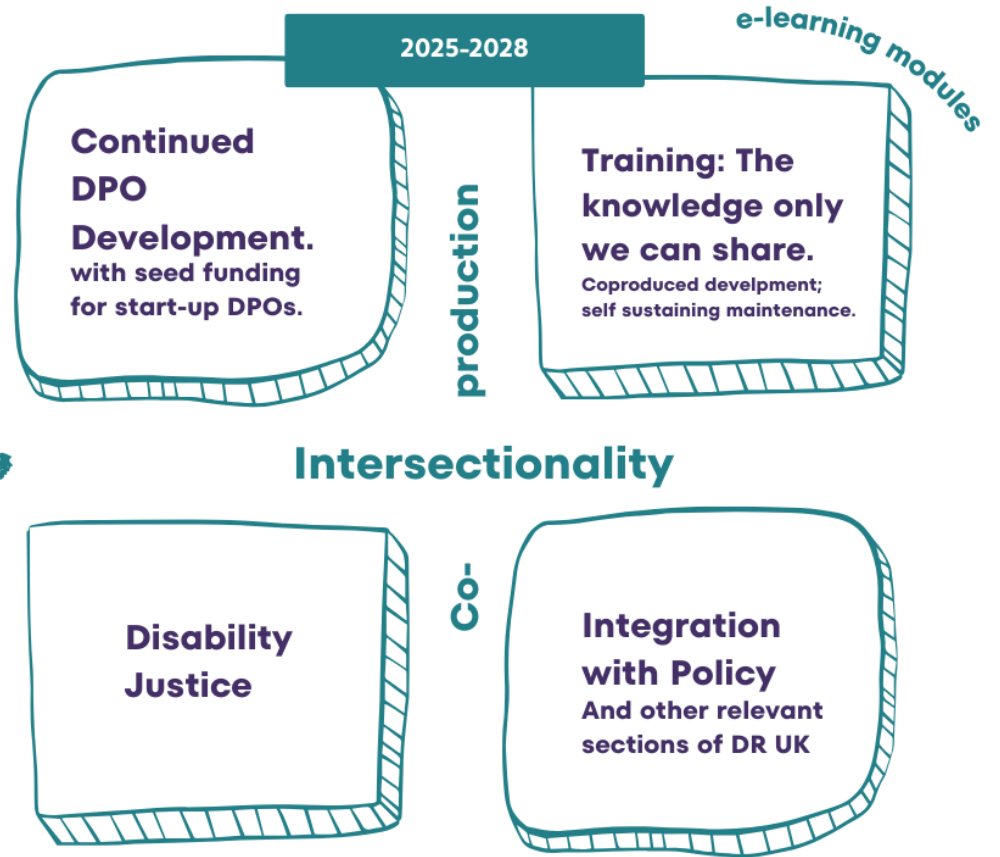
Disability Rights UK was urged not only to distribute specialised knowledge but also to convene independent DPO expertise to reach a consensus on critical issues; this would then be used to develop training resources. A significant example of this approach would be

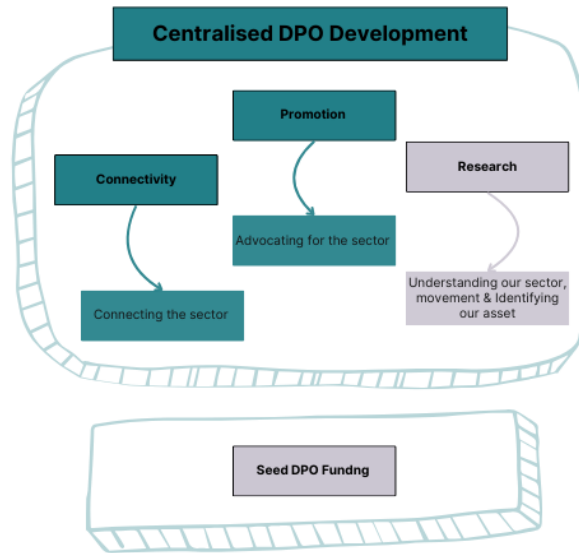
convening discussions on Disability Justice and establishing a UK-specific definition of the Social Model of Disability. By co-producing these narratives and then distributing training based on them, both the sector and the movement can be developed in ways that are most critical to the future of the disability rights movement.

4. Recommendations

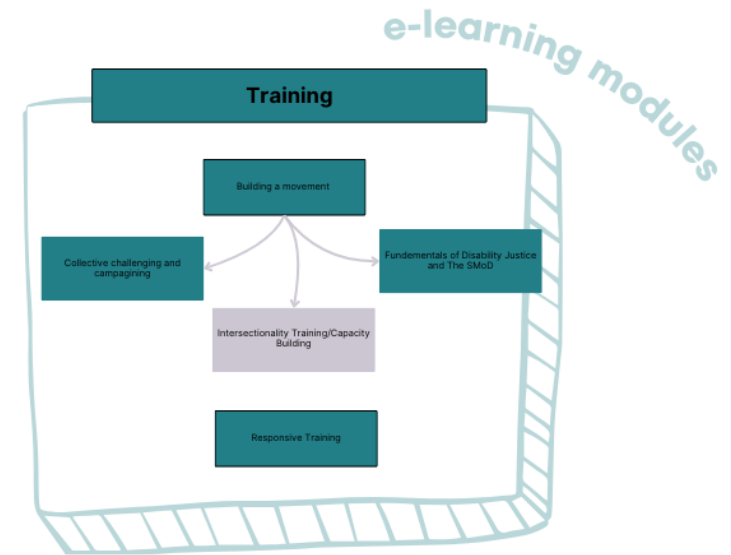
This report recommends that the insights gathered from the sector should directly inform the design of the 2025 to 2028 DPO Development and Justice Project. A key directive from the DPOs is for Disability Rights UK to transition towards an infrastructure role dedicated to supporting DPOs.

Preparing the organisation to distribute capacity-building and development initiatives horizontally across the sector is vital to the project's sustainability and impact.





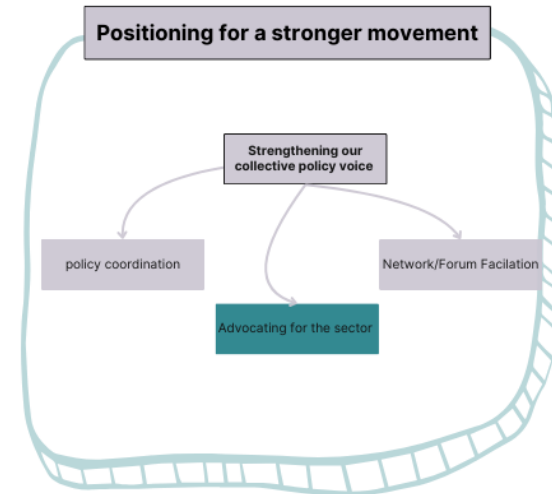
Co-production



Intersectionality



Equitable



DPO Development: While many aspects of DPO development from previous iterations should be continued, they should be revised in light of the needs identified in this report, particularly in terms of connectivity and promotion. Additionally, research should be established as a key priority of the project.

Training: In response to the findings on training, and the need for horizontal support across the organisation, it is recommended that multiple teams within DR UK collaborate to develop training resources for DPOs that align with the development of a social justice ecosystem, as outlined in the findings on training.

Disability Justice: Intersectionality and the coproductive creation of a Social Justice Ecosystem emerged as pressing priorities from DPOs; reflecting calls that have resonated throughout the Disability Rights movement for over a decade. These elements are encapsulated in Disability Justice as defined in Sans Invalid's 2015 paper ², which anticipated a second wave of the disabled people's movement. This report recommends that the project be committed to advancing Disability Justice in the sector and supporting Disability Rights UK in reorienting its policy approach based on these foundations. Vital to this is building alliances with other social justice movements to create a unified, anti-oppression call.

Integration with Policy: Integrating these efforts with the policy department and other relevant sections of the organisation is essential to effectively distribute DPO development and fulfil the needs of Disability Justice as a framework.

Core principles: Overall, the project should maintain coproduction and intersectionality as its core principles, ensuring these priorities are woven into every aspect of its work and the broader activities of Disability Rights UK.



Connect a Social Justice

Ecosystem. Shift the sector and movement to a Disability Justice & Intersectionality framework; connect social justice movements in the UK

Unite the political voice: Synthesise, connect and coordinate the campaigns of the DPO Sector & activists

Develop the foundations of the movement: Strengthen the sector of Disabled Peoples Organisations, Intersectional DPOs and Seed Funded Disabled People Led Groups

5. Conclusion

The DPO Capacity Building Project has made substantial progress over the past two years. However, as it enters its next phase, adapting and evolving based on the DPO Sector's mandates is crucial.

By addressing the identified needs and leveraging the sector's strengths, the project can continue to empower DPOs across the UK and ensure the advancement of disabled people's rights, justice and opportunities.

References

1. Disability Rights UK., 2023. *DPO Sector Analysis: Part 1*. The DPO Sector Research Report (1st ed.)
2. Sans Invalid., 2015. *10 Principles of Disability Justice* (1st ed.)