

An online game to educate children on safe internet use

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Irish SME Zeeko wants to reduce the number of negative online experiences for children, through education. Can its software live up to EU expectations on the matter?

It's quite remarkable how quickly [children](#) at a very young age come to

grips with the mechanics of a smartphone. So remarkable actually that it could easily make us forget how vulnerable they are when browsing the internet, and how important it is to provide them with the tools to effectively deal with these risks.

The extent of the problem is revealed by EU statistics on online risk: Four out of 10 children have at least once been the victims of cyberbullying or exposed to content promoting anorexia, self-harm, drug-taking or suicide. According to Irish start-up Zeeko, an online wellbeing education platform where children can 'teach' internet safety to each other would considerably alleviate the impact of such experiences.

"The internet is a fantastic resource for children. However, we are concerned about the negative impact it can have on their lives. With our Appyness Online (AO) platform, I believe we can positively impact how internet safety education is delivered to children in [primary schools](#) across Europe as well as reduce the consequences of negative experiences," says Joe Kenny, CEO of Zeeko.

Zeeko's ambitions are in line with the EU's declared need for an effective education programme that will highlight online risks to children and equip them with the tools to deal with these risks. With this in mind, the company applied for funding under phase 1 of the SME Instrument and kicked off the iSAFE project in June 2017.

"As part of an initial feasibility study, Zeeko conducted research on the commercial, technical and social dimensions to the creation and roll-out of Appyness Online. It was found that Appyness Online is feasible, viable and desirable," Kenny explains.

Built as an online 3-D world/game, AO is a web-based software package where players are represented by an individual avatar in an 'online playground' and have to navigate through and complete each module.

Children would usually work in groups in classrooms or at home. Homework tasks are completed in groups via the online world, and children can communicate on these tasks with instant messaging. The software also provides real-time semantic analysis of young people's instant message communications (similar in concept to Twitter trends) to identify online risks and alert the account holder (parents or guardians).

"What makes AO unique is that it will positively impact how [internet](#) safety education is delivered to children. Current solutions do not adequately protect children from Internet vulnerabilities, whilst AO does it by providing children with high quality content raising awareness about online risks, coping and self-protection strategies through a safe online environment," Kenny says.

Zeeko expects AO to have a, "significant impact on the European health and social care burden," with the number of children at risk online being reduced from 4 out of 10 to 2 out of 10 by year five.

"AO will create a Europe wide database of digital wellbeing data to provide an unprecedented insight into: digital literacy, digital emotional quotient, and the level of critical thinking skills," says Kenny. By 2025, he foresees that AO will generate a revenue of over EUR 1.5 million per year. Target customers are principals or head teachers in primary schools (9-12-year-old children), whilst end users are children and their parents.

Provided by CORDIS

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