



Former Kindred innovation chief to launch cross-operator data science player-protection platform

Will Mace presents EQ-Connect to leading UK operators as a collaborative start-up product for calculating holistic player risk scores

Jake Evans 25 August 2020



Former Kindred Group innovation lead Will Mace is seeking to protect at-risk players from gambling-related harm with the imminent launch of a new collaborative data science platform.

Mace, who departed his role as head of Kindred Futures in March, now works full time on EQ-Connect with co-founder Jeremy Harding-Roberts, an industry fraud specialist formerly of Betfair and Betclix.

The safer gambling start-up boasts a core team of four; two co-founders, a CTO and a lead data scientist, while information security and data privacy consultants provide expertise when necessary.

The team is London-centric but currently works on a remote basis.

EQ-Connect collects and analyses raw player data from gambling operators to provide users with a cross-company risk score out of 100 after drawing conclusions from behavioural patterns.

While operators have been calculating their own risk scores for some time, the data collection methods are often different, leading to standardisation issues.

EQ-Connect hopes to solve this problem by collecting raw data across a consumer's preferred playing sites and brands, before crunching the numbers to calculate an overall risk score up to 100.

"What we ideally want is the raw player behavioural data, without operators having already interpreted it," Mace tells *EGR*.

"Because if the data has been interpreted by one operator, you can't mesh it together with interpreted data from another operator as you need raw data to create a fair single view."

The risk score is calculated through machine-learning algorithms being built and developed under the advice of Professor Mark Griffiths, a leading behavioural addiction psychologist.

"He is very much guiding the behaviours and patterns that we look for and identify," says Mace.

EQ-Connect had several promising conversations with operators one year ago before the UK Gambling Commission (UKGC) instructed the Betting and Gaming Council (BGC) to work on and develop a similar universal solution as part of a series of player safety working groups.

One of the working groups is set to evaluate the proposals put forward by EQ-Connect before the start-up begins collaborating with operators via a pilot scheme of the software.

"I think the industry wants to show itself to be proactive rather than reactive," says Mace. "What we're proposing is certainly well beyond the current licence conditions.

"We're trying to work with the industry to make a really big, proactive, positive step to protect vulnerable gamblers," he adds.

The intention is for the working groups to succeed where previous industry collaborations have failed due to the ultra-competitive nature of the sector and an unwillingness to share potentially commercially sensitive data sets.

"We're at great pains to ensure operators are not sharing data with each other," says Mace. "They're sharing data with us and we analyse and aggregate it.

"It is important this is seen as a tool to better identify and protect vulnerable gamblers. It is not about adding to the already intense competition between operators," he adds.

EQ-Connect is funded in part by Innovate UK, the UK Government's innovation agency, and was founded to combat three major issues:

How can gambling operators really protect players when they are blind to their activity on every other gambling site?

How can the gambling industry protect players before their play becomes harmful and unaffordable?

How can operators protect players at exactly the moment they are losing control?