

The complaint

Mr T complains about the service provided by Wise Payments Limited ("Wise") when he tried to carry out a transfer.

What happened

In June 2021, Mr T wanted to transfer £150,000 from a Sterling account to a Euro account. He said he'd been asked to submit a number of documents before the transfer could be processed, which would be difficult for him to get. He wanted to know how to proceed. An adviser on Wise's webchat function said he'd pass Mr T's queries to the 'large payments team'.

Mr T further explained that he didn't know what the upper limit was to transfer funds without needing to submit so much paperwork. The adviser initially said if Mr T made the transfer in two smaller transactions (below £80,000) the documents likely wouldn't be required. Shortly afterwards, the adviser contacted Mr T and apologised that he had previously given him incorrect information and reiterated that Mr T's questions would be escalated.

Mr T continued to contact Wise over email and webchat asking for urgent responses. During this period, he had also asked how the fees would be affected if he split his transfers into two smaller ones. Mr T was repeatedly told by the webchat advisers that his questions would be escalated. In the meantime, Mr T began the process of setting up two transfers. He says he paused these, given that he was waiting for answers to his questions. However, he says the rate then changed. This was because Mr T hadn't clicked through to the next stage soon enough, meaning the rate hadn't been secured. And the exchange rate had become less favourable during this time. Mr T then continued to monitor the rates before settling on one later that day, which was secured for 24 hours.

An adviser from the large payments team contacted Mr T the next day. Mr T says he was dealing with an emergency at work at the time, and his card and PIN were at home. So, he says he had to rush to get them and make the transfers in just a few hours before his secured rate expired. But later that day, Mr T was able to process the transfers at the rate he'd secured.

Mr T was unhappy about the service he'd received. He said that the guaranteed response time for the large payments team was up to 48 hours, however a rate could only be secured for 24 hours. He wanted Wise to honour the rate he'd tried to secure initially. And, he said that the webchat advisers he was speaking with should have told him the rate hadn't been secured, and he would need to proceed to the end of the process to ensure this was done. Mr T says he was then inconvenienced by having to monitor the rates, and the one he eventually secured resulted in a £615 loss.

Mr T also pointed out that Wise offer a discount on their arrangement fees when a customer transfers above £100,000 in one calendar month. He says he sent £170,000 in one month (£20,000, £75,000 and £75,000) and thinks this should've resulted in a discount, which he hadn't received. Unhappy about all these matters, he complained to Wise.

Wise reviewed Mr T's complaint. In summary, it apologised that its service didn't meet Mr T's expectations. It also provided some explanations about its processes, so any future transactions he had would go through as expected.

In relation to the fee, Wise explained that Mr T had previously completed a £20,000 transfer in June. But he set up the second transfer of £75,000, before the first £75,000 transfer had completed. And the discount took into account completed transfers. So, because he hadn't reached the £100,000 threshold at the point that any of the two transfers were set up, and the discount is applied at the point a transfer is set up, a discount wasn't applied. Overall, it didn't uphold his complaint.

Mr T brought his complaint to this service. One of our investigators reviewed matters and, in summary, thought Wise had responded to Mr T's questions within the advised timescales. He also thought that the advisers Mr T spoke with weren't to know his transfers were still at the 'review' stage. And, he explained that Wise had since agreed to refund the difference between the fee Mr T paid, and the discounted fee he would've paid had the £150,000 been sent in one transfer – which he thought was a fair resolution to the complaint.

Wise didn't dispute our investigator's findings. Mr T did, and mostly repeated his earlier points. As an agreement couldn't be reached, the case has come to me to decide.

What I've decided – and why

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

For reference, Mr T has two complaints with this service about Wise. Many of the issues overlap. However, this decision will only address his complaint about events of June 2021 and the issues that I consider to be materially relevant to the crux of that. However, I've given careful consideration to all of the submissions made to date, in relation to this complaint.

As I understand it, the webchat function for the large payments team had been switched off due to a lack of coverage, and only the general customer support line remained open. Given that these advisers weren't able to answer Mr T's questions, they were escalated to the large payments team who guarantee responses within 48 hours.

I acknowledge this would've been frustrating for Mr T, particularly given the potential for the fluctuation in rates during this period and how that might affect that large sum of money he was attempting to transfer. Additionally, a rate is secured for only 24 hours, which means Mr T might not have had an answer to his questions by the time the rate was due to expire.

That being said, 48 hours is a fairly standard response time for organisations. And importantly, in Mr T's case, the large payments team did get back to him within the 24 hours he'd secured a rate for. I appreciate that Mr T said he was busy at the time, and he needed to rush to ensure the transfers were processed, as he didn't have the details with him at the time. But Mr T had secured a rate for 24 hours and Wise responded to him in that timeframe – exceeding the service agreement set. So, I don't think it caused any undue delay.

I note that Mr T wanted urgent answers to his questions. He says that had he received these he would have processed the transfers at the more favourable rate he'd seen earlier. Wise explained that its general customer support team isn't able to answer questions about high value transfers, and this is dealt with by its dedicated large payments team. I don't think this was unreasonable, given the sum of money Mr T was trying to transfer. I've also considered that Mr T was asking specific questions about how he could avoid having to submit

documents for verification checks, and the overall fees charged on large amounts. So, I think it's reasonable Wise would want to refer this to its specialist team. And, as outlined, the team responded to Mr T the next day.

It's unfortunate that Mr T thought the more favourable rate had been secured earlier in the day, when this wasn't the case, given that he remained at the 'review' stage. Mr T says the advisers he spoke with should've told him the initial rate wouldn't be secured unless he completed the process. However, from the webchat logs I've seen, I can't see that Mr T made the advisers aware that the transfers were at the 'review' stage at the time. The logs I've seen show that he contacted the advisers once the rate had already refreshed. And, given that Wise said it had no visibility of attempted transfers, I can see why it wouldn't have been immediately obvious to the advisers that they would need to tell Mr T to continue through the process to secure a rate.

I've also considered that Wise has said instructions on how to complete a transfer are visible during the transfer process. And, its website states: *'Keep in mind that if you remain at one step of the transfer setup process for more than 30 minutes, the guaranteed rate will refresh'*, which I think clearly outlines the process here.

So, whilst I acknowledge Mr T's disappointment when he realised the rate hadn't been secured, I'm not persuaded that this is due to something Wise had done wrong.

Overall, the whole process took around one day, and Mr T was able to successfully complete the transfers at the rate he had secured. And, having reviewed Wise's actions during the process, I'm not persuaded that it caused any unnecessary delays.

Mr T is also unhappy that a discounted fee wasn't applied to his transfers and found Wise's explanation about this confusing. Wise explained that it offers a 0.1% discount once a customer has completed over £100,000 worth of transfers in a calendar month. Wise further explained the discount is automatically applied, where appropriate, at the point the transfer is set up.

Mr T had completed a £20,000 transfer in June before he set up his two transfers of £75,000. However, he set up both £75,000 transfers around the same time. The discounted fee is applied at the point the transfer is set up and takes into account existing transfers which have already completed. Neither of the £75,000 transfers had completed by the time the other was set up. So, given that Mr T hadn't reached £100,000 of transfers at the point either £75,000 transfer was set up, a discount wasn't applied to these.

However, since the complaint has been with this service, Wise acknowledged that its explanation of this on its website could have been clearer – particularly related to concurrent transfers. So, as a gesture of goodwill, it has agreed to offer Mr T the difference between the fee he paid, and the discounted fee he would have paid, had the transfer of £150,000 been completed in one transfer.

I've thought carefully about this and I think this is a fair resolution to this complaint, as it will put Mr T in the position he would have been in, had he transferred £150,000 in one transfer. So, I direct Wise to calculate this figure and pay Mr T the difference between the fee he paid, and the fee he would have paid had the transfer been completed in one transfer.

When calculating this figure, Wise should ensure it is mindful of any previously completed transfers in that calendar month and ensure this has been factored into its calculations, where appropriate, when it pays Mr T.

My final decision

I uphold this complaint and direct Wise Payments Limited to settle this complaint as outlined above.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr T to accept or reject my decision before 2 September 2022.

Hana Yousef
Ombudsman