

The complaint

Mr W complains Barclays Bank UK PLC didn't do enough to protect him when he fell victim to a cryptocurrency investment scam.

What happened

Mr W has an account with Barclays and a cryptocurrency wallet. He also has an account with another business who I'll refer to as "R" and a wallet he uses to make payments.

Mr W says he'd been reading about cryptocurrency online in 2023 when he was "randomly added" to a group on a well-known messaging app of people who were making money trading cryptocurrency. He says he watched what went on in the group for a while and it appeared to consist of "normal people" making money from cryptocurrency. He says he was then contacted individually and asked if he was interested in investing. He then spoke to someone who showed him what was involved and introduced him to a trading platform.

Mr W agreed to invest and says he paid £210,000 in total towards the scam between 4 October 2023 and 6 November 2023. He says £131,000 of this was paid from his account with R and £79,000 of this was paid from his account with Barclays. He made some of these payments via the other wallet I've mentioned above. He was, in fact, speaking to scammers.

Mr W says his account with R contained savings that he'd built up over time from his earnings. He used these savings to fund the payments he made to the investment. He says he transferred £64,000 from his account with R to his account with Barclays in order to help fund the payments from his account with Barclays towards the investment.

Mr W says that he was told he had around £1,400,000 in his account having traded for several weeks which he decided to withdraw which others in the group appeared to be doing with ease. He says he was told he'd need to pay fees in order to do so which he did. He says he realised he'd been scammed when he was told he'd need to pay another fee on top of the ones he'd paid. He says he FCA issued a warning about the platform in question the following day. He contacted R and Barclays to say he'd been scammed and ask for a refund.

Barclays looked into Mr W's claim and said that the smaller payments he'd made weren't concerning as he'd made payments to the same cryptocurrency wallet before and the same wallet. It did, however, accept that two of the larger payments he made – one for £30,000 and one for £40,000 – weren't in line with his normal account usage. Barclays, however, said that the £40,000 was flagged and an agent had spoken to Mr W on the phone and completed a robust and highly detailed scam conversation with him. Barclays said it had had no reason to invoke the banking protocol based on the answers Mr W had given and no reason not to let the payments through. And that it couldn't offer a refund in the circumstances. Mr W wasn't happy with Barclays' response – or R's which was similar – and so complained to our service.

One of our investigators looked into Mr W's complaint against Barclays and said that he hadn't been honest when Barclays had intervened, so they didn't think there was anything Barclays could have done to prevent further losses to Mr W. In short, they didn't uphold the

complaint. They didn't uphold Mr W's complaint against Revolut either. Mr W was very unhappy with our investigator's recommendations, saying that they hadn't consider the detailed evidence that had been sent in and hadn't, for example, mentioned the fact that he was vulnerable at the time. They asked for both of their complaints to be referred to an ombudsman for a decision. Both complaints were, as a result, passed to me.

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.

In this case, I can see that Mr W has made a considerable number of large payments all of which have gone via a cryptocurrency wallet he'd set up before this scam to the scam. He's told us that he'd invested in cryptocurrency in the past, but only in a limited way. I accept that. The problem is, however, that when Barclays – and for that matter R – started stopping his payments and warning him that he might be falling for a scam and asking him what the purpose of his payments were, he consistently said that he was investing in cryptocurrency, that he'd been investing in cryptocurrency for three years, that he was using a legitimate and well-known cryptocurrency provider, that he was investing based on his own research, that he'd opened his wallet himself and was able to make payments backwards and forwards and that he wasn't been assisted by a third party. Those are the types of answers that would have assured Barclays that Mr W was simply investing in cryptocurrency and wasn't falling for a scam. I should add that I've listened to the call between Mr W and the agent from Barclays and I'm satisfied that the call was a robust and detailed one during which the agent checked Mr W wasn't being scammed and warned him of the types of red flags to look out for. In the circumstances, I agree that neither business could have prevented Mr W from continuing to make payments towards this scam, nor could they fairly or reasonably have been expected to have concerns.

I accept that Mr W may well have been vulnerable at the time, given what he's told us happened to him in the period running up to the scam. I've seen no evidence, however, to suggest that Mr W shared this with either business at the time, nor have I seen anything to suggest that they should have picked this up. I do want to reassure Mr W, however, that I haven't overlooked this or any of the rest of the detailed evidence that's been sent in. Having considered everything, however, I agree that this isn't a complaint that we can uphold.

My final decision

My final decision is that I'm not upholding this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr W to accept or reject my decision before 1 January 2025.

Nicolas Atkinson
Ombudsman