

## **The complaint**

Miss M complains that Wise Payments Ltd. ('Wise') declined to refund her £4,650, which she says she lost as a result of a scam.

## **What happened**

The details of this complaint are well-known to both parties, so I won't go into every detail of what happened here. But in summary, in March 2024 Miss M sent two payments through Wise of £2,512 and £2,138. She sent the payments in order to help her sister secure a job and visa. Unfortunately, her sister had not been liaising with the relevant UK authorities as she had believed, and the funds were lost to a scammer.

Miss M was living and working in the UK, and her sister wanted the opportunity to do so too. Miss M's colleague gave her details of a company who may be able to help her sister find an employer who could sponsor her for a visa. When she contacted them they told her that they did not have any jobs going at the moment, but gave her the contact details of someone who may be able to help. Miss M got in touch with them via Whatapp, and they told her they were recruiting for care worker positions. She looked up the company online and found a professional and legitimate website which contained detailed information about the company. Her sister shared relevant documentation with them such as her identification documents, CV and relevant qualifications to help them find the most appropriate position for her. Miss M said her sister sent the 'company' applications for them to look over before she submitted them, too.

The company said that they required payment for their services and for assisting with the visa application. They sent her two different accounts to send the funds to and so Miss M sent the two payments from her Wise account on 4 and 6 March 2024. When Miss M did not hear back from the company, she contacted them and they sent her and her sister an offer of employment. Miss M was confused as her sister had not been interviewed for this position, so she contacted the company through the email details on their website. The company emailed her back to tell her that they did not charge for their services and alerted her to the fact it was almost certainly a scam. Miss M reported it to Wise and Action Fraud.

Wise looked into what happened and declined to refund any of Miss M's losses. In short, they said that they had followed Miss M's payment instructions and showed her warnings about the risks of scams when sending transfers to different recipients at the time of the payments, so they did not think they had done anything wrong.

Unhappy with their response, Miss M escalated her concerns to our service and one of our investigators looked into her complaint. They did not recommend that Wise ought to reimburse Miss M's losses. In summary, they said that they were not persuaded that either of the payments should have been recognised as unusual or out of character for her account. So they did not think Wise ought to have been alerted that she was at risk of fraud or financial harm, such that they ought to have intervened with the payments. They also said they were satisfied that Wise attempted to recover her money from the beneficiaries but that unfortunately there were no funds to recover.

Miss M did not agree. She said, through her representatives, that £4,650 had been sent in one day to two new payees. She argued that this activity was unusual for her account, which normally only sent or received a few hundred pounds at a time. They said in line with

relevant regulations, Wise ought to have intervened with the payment. Our investigator let them know that the payments were on two different days, and that their opinion on the complaint remained the same. As no agreement could be reached, the case has been passed 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.

I'd like to start by saying that I do believe that Miss M and her sister were the victims of a cruel and callous scam. I was saddened to read of what they were both put through, as I know the scam continues to have a profound impact on them. So, I'd like to start by offering my sympathies for what they were put through.

My role here is to assess Wise's actions against what they ought to have done – and having done so, I don't think it would be fair and reasonable for me to hold Wise liable for Miss M's loss. So, having considered everything, I am not able to uphold Miss M's complaint. I do appreciate how disappointing this will be for Miss M, but I don't think I can fairly say that Wise should reimburse her account with the money that was unfortunately lost to the scammer. I'll explain why.

In broad terms, the starting position in law is that a bank is expected to process payments and withdrawals that a customer authorises, in accordance with the Payment Service Regulations and the terms and conditions of the customer's account. However, where the consumer made the payment as a consequence of the actions of a fraudster, it may sometimes be fair and reasonable for the bank to reimburse the consumer even though they authorised the payment. Considering the law, regulators rules and guidance, relevant codes of practice and what I consider to have been good industry practice at the time, I think Wise should fairly and reasonably:

- Have been monitoring accounts and any payments made or received to counter various risks, including anti-money laundering, countering the financing of terrorism, and preventing fraud and scams.
- Have had systems in place to look out for unusual transactions or other signs that might indicate that its customers were at risk of fraud (among other things). This is particularly so given the increase in sophisticated fraud and scams in recent years, which banks are generally more familiar with than the average customer.
- In some circumstances, irrespective of the payment channel used, have taken additional steps, or make additional checks, before processing a payment, or in some cases declined to make a payment altogether, to help protect customers from the possibility of financial harm from fraud.

This means that there are circumstances where Wise should fairly and reasonably take additional steps or make additional checks before processing a payment, or in some cases decline to make a payment altogether, to help protect customers from the possibility of financial harm.

I've thought carefully about the two payments Miss M made from her account to the scammers. Having done so, I don't think it would be fair to conclude that either payment could be considered unusual and out of character for Miss M's account. I appreciate that these are not inconsequential sums of money to send, but I do not think they stood out as so unusual that Wise were obligated to intervene. The payments were made two days apart to two different individuals, so I don't think Wise could have reasonably known that the two payments were linked to one another. Miss M's account balance was sufficient that it covered both of the payments. Whilst it is true that Miss M usually made lower value payments, there are some adhoc higher value payments. It is not uncommon for people who

don't frequently send thousands of pounds to do this on an adhoc basis. So, I don't think there was anything that meant Wise needed to intervene, and so I can't say that Miss M's loss was down to any particular failing of Wise in this case.

I have also considered whether Wise could have done more to try to recover the money once they had been told of the scam. I would expect a business to take reasonable steps to try and recover the money from the bank it was sent to. Wise did try to recover the funds Miss M sent to the scammer, but were able to evidence that unfortunately by the time they were notified of the scam, the funds had been moved on from the receiving account. Unfortunately this is not unusual, as scammers move or withdraw funds quickly so they do not lose access to them. So, I don't think Wise could have done anything further to recover Miss M's funds here.

Having considered all of this, I do not think it would be fair and reasonable to ask Wise to refund the money Miss M lost as the result of this scam. I am sorry to disapoint her, as I know this has had a significant impact on her . But having thought carefully about what happened, I do not think Wise are responsible for the loss here.

### **My final decision**

I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss M to accept or reject my decision before 22 August 2025.

Katherine Jones  
**Ombudsman**