

## **The complaint**

Ms V complains that NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY (“NatWest”) hasn’t protected her from losing money to a scam.

## **What happened**

The background to this complaint is well known to both parties, so I won’t repeat everything here. In brief summary, Ms V has explained that in August and September 2024 she made three payments from her NatWest account ultimately for what she thought was a legitimate investment. Ms V subsequently came to believe she’d been scammed and got in touch with NatWest. Ultimately, NatWest didn’t reimburse Ms V’s lost funds, and Ms V referred her complaint about NatWest to us. As our Investigator couldn’t resolve the matter informally, the case has been passed to me for a decision.

## **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’ve focused on what I think is the heart of the matter here. If there’s something I’ve not mentioned, it isn’t because I’ve ignored it. I haven’t. I’m satisfied I don’t need to comment on every individual point or argument to be able to reach what I think is the right outcome. Our rules allow me to do this. This simply reflects the informal nature of our service as a free alternative to the courts.

Having done so, I’ve decided to not uphold this complaint for the following reasons:

- It isn’t in dispute that Ms V authorised the transactions in question. She is therefore presumed liable for any loss in the first instance. However, NatWest is aware, taking account of longstanding regulatory expectations and requirements into account, and what I consider to be good industry practice at the time, that it should have been on the look-out for the possibility of fraud and made additional checks before processing transactions in some circumstances.
- However, whilst I want to acknowledge my natural sympathy Ms V was scammed – I really am extremely sorry she’s lost this money to a scam – my role requires that I remain impartial. And where I can’t be sure about something I need to make up my mind on the balance of probabilities – in other words, based on what I think most likely would have happened taking into account all the available evidence and arguments. And having done so, unfortunately for Ms V, I’m not persuaded here that even NatWest had intervened in these payments proportionately, that this most likely would have changed what happened. I think it’s most likely Ms V would have made these transactions anyway.
- I say this because I wouldn’t expect NatWest to have been concerned about the second and third payments (which were for £2,400 and £600 respectively). And even with regards to the first payment, which was for £15,350, there’s a balance to be

struck between identifying and proportionately intervening in payments that could potentially be fraudulent, and minimising disruption to legitimate payments (allowing customers ready access to their funds). This was a large payment, but it was going to an account in Ms V's name, a payee I understand Ms V had set up on her account some months previously, such that there were prior transactions between the accounts. So whilst I would expect NatWest to have intervened in this payment, I wouldn't reasonably have expected an interrogation. I think instead it would have been proportionate for NatWest to ask Ms V some questions about the payment and to have then provided her with tailored fraud and scams warnings, based on their interaction with her.

- However, I do note, that at the same time as issuing this decision, I'm concurrently issuing a decision on Ms V's complaint about who I'll call in this decision Bank R. Ms V sent the payments from her NatWest account to her account with Bank R and then onto cryptocurrency and ultimately the scammers. And as I have explained within my decision on Ms V's complaint about Bank R, it's evident that Bank R did intervene in Ms V's payments from her account with Bank R, and there was one instance in particular where it gave her relevant and tailored warnings about investment scams like this one Ms V was falling victim to. And unfortunately for Ms V, for the same reasons as I've explained in my decision about her complaint about Bank R, I think it's most likely that if NatWest had intervened proportionately, that this most likely wouldn't have made a difference. The information about Ms V's complaint about Bank R persuades me that tailored warnings that were on point weren't enough to dissuade Ms V from continuing with her payments, and I think this is likely due to how convincing the investment became to Ms V as she has described in her submissions. In circumstances like this, and I've thought about this really carefully, it seems likely to me that Ms V was unfortunately under the spell of the scam such that I can't fairly say NatWest ought reasonably to have been able to prevent the payments if it had intervened proportionately.
- I'm also not persuaded there were any prospects of NatWest successfully recovering the funds, given the money was sent to Ms V's own account with Bank R and used to purchase cryptocurrency from a legitimate provider, which was then sent on and lost to the scammers.

I've considered everything Ms V and her representative have said, including what they've said about Ms V's personal circumstances. And I'm really sorry Ms V was scammed and lost this money. Despite my natural sympathy, however, I can't fairly tell NatWest to reimburse her in circumstances where I'm not persuaded it reasonably ought to have prevented the transactions, or to have recovered them.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons explained, I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms V to accept or reject my decision before 23 October 2025.

Neil Bridge  
**Ombudsman**