

The complaint

Mr B complains that Barclays Bank UK PLC won't refund the money he lost when he was the victim of a scam.

Mr B is represented by a third-party firm, but for ease of reference I will refer to Mr B throughout the decision.

What happened

The background to this complaint is well known to both parties, so I won't repeat everything here.

In summary, Mr B saw an advertisement on social media promoting a cryptocurrency investment with a company I will refer to as "X". Mr B has advised that he carried out research on X and found that the reviews were positive. He reached out to X and was contacted by an account manager (who I will refer to as "the scammer"). He has explained the scammer was professional and built a rapport with him by speaking to him on a regular basis. The scammer, through remote access software, helped Mr B set up accounts with legitimate payment platforms. He was also given access to X's platform and was told he needed to make an initial deposit to help open his account.

Mr B then made a number of payments in November and December 2023 believing this was a legitimate investment. The funds were sent to payment platforms and to his account with another firm which I will refer to as "R", before being sent into the control of the scammers.

In January 2024 Mr B was told his profits were around \$350,000 but when he asked to withdraw some funds, he was told to pay additional fees, which he did. He was told these fees would be refundable. Mr B has advised his profits were around \$3million when the scammer reached out to explain all his funds had been lost. It was shortly after this that he realised he had been scammed. Mr B has advised he lost £603,000 as a result of the scam.

Mr B raised a complaint with Barclays. Barclays didn't think it had done anything wrong by allowing the payments to go through. So, Mr B brought his complaint to our service.

Our Investigator looked into the complaint but didn't uphold it. She explained that Barclays had intervened several times and spoken to Mr B about his payments. This was because it had concerns that he may be falling victim to a scam. However, Mr B had provided inaccurate information to Barclays when questioned about the payments. And in the circumstances, she didn't feel that further intervention from Barclays would have stopped Mr B from sending the funds.

Mr B didn't agree. In summary, he said that Barclays should have picked up on the inconsistent reasons he gave for the payments, it should have invoked banking protocol when he was in branch, and it should have known that some of the payments he was sending were to cryptocurrency providers. He felt that Barclays had multiple opportunities to prevent the scam.

Mr B's complaint has now been passed to me for review and 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'm sorry to learn what happened to Mr B, but I'm not upholding this complaint - for broadly the same reasons as the Investigator.

I'm aware that I've summarised this complaint briefly, in less detail than has been provided, and in my own words. No discourtesy is intended by this. Instead, I've focussed on what I think is the heart of the matter here. If there's something I have not mentioned, it isn't because I have ignored it. I haven't. I'm satisfied that 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.

In line with the Payment Services Regulations 2017, consumers are generally liable for payments they authorise. Barclays is expected to process authorised payment instructions without undue delay. But it also has obligations to help protect customers from financial harm from fraud and scams. Those obligations are however predicated on there having been a risk of loss to a fraud or scam present.

I think it's important to note here that we have limited information on the losses Mr B has suffered as a result of this scam. We've been provided with some statement data, but these don't cover all the payments or show that the funds were subsequently sent to the scammer. Generally, I would expect to see some more evidence to link the disputed payments to a scam, before considering if Barclays should have done anything else to intervene in the payments.

However, I don't think this makes a difference to the outcome of Mr B's complaint because, like the Investigator, I don't think further interventions from Barclays would have made a difference to Mr B's decision to invest. So, I'm going to proceed on the basis that Mr B did suffer a loss to the scam he's described.

Barclays recognised that some of the payments Mr B was making were high risk and provided him with advice and warnings to try and protect him from being scammed. It spoke to him on multiple occasions during the scam period. It intervened early on to try and find out details about the payments Mr B was making. I've highlighted some of the key messages shared in the calls below.

- Mr B made it clear to Barclays that he hadn't been told by anyone to make the payments, that he hadn't been told what to say or to lie to Barclays.
- Mr B stated he hadn't been told to lie about the purpose of the payments. Barclays highlighted this was a common tactic used by scammers. This point was highlighted multiple times.
- He confirmed he had opened his account with R himself and had full access to it. He was questioned about this multiple times.
- He highlighted he was using the payments for various reasons such as internet purchases during a sale period and better currency rates. Barclays questioned him about his intentions with the payments once it left the account, including what he planned to do with it after it reached R.
- Barclays asked if he was being encouraged to move the funds to R and then onto cryptocurrency providers. It highlighted that if he was moving the funds out of his

account at R and out of his control then it's likely that he was being scammed and that he would lose the funds.

- He was asked if he was investing and if anyone had got in touch recently offering him an investment opportunity. Mr B highlighted that he wasn't investing in cryptocurrency. He also confirmed he hadn't been guaranteed any profits.
- Barclays questioned if Mr B was using remote access software, which allowed scammers to take control of his device or share details with them which they highlighted scammers often do. Mr B confirmed that wasn't the case. But in one call he did highlight that any remote access tools which Barclays may have picked up on were used by his IT department for work purposes.
- Mr B highlighted that he wasn't falling for a scam and that he was confident of this.

Towards the end of the scam Barclays saw that Mr B was making payments to a cryptocurrency provider. In one of the calls, it asked probing questions around how he found out about the company he was dealing with, whether it was regulated, whether he had checked reviews and whether he was happy with the research he had done. It asked if anyone had helped him set up the account and if he was dealing with a financial adviser. It also asked if he had allowed someone remote access to his device. Mr B's answers wouldn't have highlighted he was being told to make the payments. But Barclays highlighted its concerns as Mr B insisted the payment didn't relate to cryptocurrency, so it didn't put the payment through.

Overall, I think it would have been difficult for Barclays to provide Mr B with further advice on how to protect himself in these calls based on the information he had given it. He didn't highlight that he was being guided by the scammers. Mr B had also provided incorrect information to Barclays about the payments on multiple occasions. He didn't highlight that the payments he was making were for cryptocurrency. His initial payments weren't sent to a provider that only dealt with cryptocurrency, so it wouldn't have been obvious to Barclays that Mr B may not have been truthful in his responses. If Mr B had advised he had reached out to X online and that he was required to send payments to X's platform which he didn't have access to, then I think Barclays would have identified this as a red flag and taken further steps to protect him. Unfortunately, Barclays were prevented from knowing the true purpose of most the payments. And so, I don't think it acted unreasonably by providing the scam warnings it did. I can also see that Mr B has provided inaccurate information to R when it intervened to discuss payments so even if Barclays had probed further, I don't think Mr B would have revealed the true reasons for the payments.

Barclays have also confirmed that it asked Mr B to go into branch. On one occasion it asked the police to attend the branch to discuss a payment as it was concerned he may be falling victim to a scam. The information provided suggests both the police and Barclays were happy with the answers Mr B provided them allowing the payment to be released.

Mr B insists that better intervention from Barclays would have prevented his losses. I agree that Barclays could have gone into more detail around the risks associated with cryptocurrency payments in some of the calls. But I'm not persuaded that additional warnings, had they been given, would have made a difference to Mr B's decision to go ahead with the payments. On balance, I don't think Mr B would have revealed the true purpose behind his transfers if Barclays had probed further. It's clear that Mr B trusted what he was being told by the scammers about the investment and that he was willing to provide inaccurate information in order to get the payments processed. I think Mr B was sadly very much under the spell of the scammers, likely because of the significant returns he was promised and the level of trust he had in the scammer. And so, considering Mr B continued to hide the true reasons for the payments from the police and R, I find it highly unlikely that he would've disclosed them to Barclays irrespective of how bespoke or tailored its

questioning could have been. I'm therefore not persuaded Barclays could have uncovered that Mr B was falling for a scam had it intervened further.

On balance, I believe that Mr B would have answered the questions in a way which allowed the payments to go through, as he had done with R and the police. In those circumstances I don't think it would be fair to ask Barclays to refund Mr B's disputed payments.

Mr B has also requested compensation in addition to a refund of the scam payments made. But I can't see any reason which would suggest compensation is warranted in the circumstances of the complaint as I have not found anything to suggest Barclays have acted incorrectly.

I have considered whether Barclays could have done anything to recover Mr B's payments once the scam was uncovered. Barclays have confirmed that it requested further information to help with recovery but in the circumstances, I don't think this would have made a difference. Mr B has confirmed he moved the cryptocurrency into the control of the scammer, so recovery would likely have failed.

To summarise, I'm sorry Mr B was the victim of a cruel scam. I'm also sorry about the information he's shared with us about how the scam has impacted him and his family. But I don't think Barclays can fairly be held responsible for his loss. And so, I can't tell it to refund Mr B's money in this case.

My final decision

My final decision is that I'm not upholding Mr B's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B to accept or reject my decision before 1 January 2026.

Aleya Khanom
Ombudsman