

The complaint

Mrs V is unhappy that Wise Payments Limited (trading as Wise) won't refund payments she made as a result of a scam.

What happened

Mrs V was the victim of a job scam involving the following payments from her Wise account:

Ref	Date	Description	Amount
1	7 January 2024	Payment to an individual 'D'	£300.00
2	7 January 2024	Payment to an individual 'D'	£780.00
3	7 January 2024	Payment to an individual 'J'	£780.00
4	8 January 2024	Payment to an individual 'H'	£2,000.00
5	8 January 2024	Payment to an individual 'Y'	£210.00
6	9 January 2024	Payment to a business 'B'	£5,000.00

In summary, Mrs V responded to a job advert she found on social media posing as a genuine travel company that I'll refer to as 'P'. As part of the job, she completed tasks on an online platform in return for commission – some of which required her to deposit her own money to supposedly earn a higher commission. She found she had to pay increasing amounts to complete the tasks, and then, further 'fees' to withdraw what she earned.

To deposit money on P's platform, Mrs V sent money from her Metro account to Wise. From there, it seems she sent funds to other Wise accounts in exchange for USDT on a crypto exchange. After that, she sent the USDT to a wallet addresses that P gave her, believing it was attached to her account. In fact, it went to fraudsters.

Wise asked Mrs V for the purpose of the first five payments from a list of options. For payments 1, 3, 4 and 5, she answered 'sending money to friends and family'. And when asked further questions, she said she'd met them in real life and they'd not asked for money unexpectedly. For the second payment, she said she was sending money to herself.

Before the final disputed payment, Wise sent Mrs V an email that she couldn't use the account for crypto trading. As she sent a further payment to an account with a crypto pattern, Wise closed her account.

After this, Mrs V continued to make payments from her Metro account to other individuals to buy USDT and ultimately send to P. Metro called her about one of these payments – its records suggest she told them it was for a friend.

Having realised she been scammed, Mrs V made a complaint to Wise that it ought to have done more to protect her from the scam, so it should refund her losses. Wise didn't uphold her complaint. In summary, it referenced the warnings it gave and said she's responsible for the payments she made.

Unhappy with its response, Mrs V brought her complaint to our service to investigate. I issued provisional findings which didn't uphold the complaint. In summary, while I thought

Wise could've done more to establish the circumstances of the payments, I didn't think it was likely that it could've reasonably unravelled the scam. So I didn't find it fair to tell Wise to refund Mrs V's losses.

Wise agreed with my findings. Mrs V and her representatives didn't. In summary:

- Mrs V explained that saying that Wise ought to have done more but then concluding it wouldn't have changed things because she was being coached entirely places the blame on her. That's despite Wise having the systems and responsibility to protect her from scams.
- She highlighted the disparity between Wise and Metro in protecting her from the scam, and how Metro has refunded some of her losses.
- Mrs V's representative explained that no evidence has been provided to show that a required intervention by Wise wouldn't have worked. And that Wise failing to follow up a deactivated account on suspicion of an advanced fee scam was a gross failure by Wise.

The complaint has now come back to me to reach a final 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.

Having considered Mrs V and her representatives' responses carefully, I've not changed my mind about what's a fair outcome to this complaint.

I can understand Mrs V's frustration with the conclusion that while Wise ought to have done more, I don't think it ought to refund her. To be clear, my intention isn't to blame Mrs V, as the victim of a cruel scam. Rather, it's that to tell a firm to put things right, it's not enough to conclude that it made a mistake. I must also be persuaded that it was this mistake that caused the losses. To say otherwise would be punishing a firm for getting something wrong, irrespective of whether it actually caused harm – and this isn't our service's role.

Here, I don't find it's likely that, had Wise carried out an appropriate intervention, it would've unravelled the scam. Mrs V's representative dispute there's evidence to support that. But I've considered the evidence that she misled Wise and Metro over what the payments were for. And why that means that I don't think it's likely Mrs V would've revealed what was actually happening, even if Wise carried out a more thorough intervention.

I have also explained the sort of warnings I'd have expected Wise to cover – around cryptocurrency investment scams – and why I don't think this would've resonated with Mrs V, given that it wasn't the scam she was falling victim to. I realise Mrs V thinks Wise ought to have covered job scams too, as it had related suspicions about one of the accounts she sent money too. But as I've said, Wise only deactivated the account on the day Mrs V made the payment to it, its investigations into this were ongoing, and the recipient had appealed. The other four beneficiary accounts were deactivated in relation to crypto trading.

Taking this into account, I think it's reasonable to conclude that the most apparent risk of harm here was related to crypto investment scams. And I don't think Wise's investigation into one account was conclusive enough to say it grossly failed her for not providing a job scam warning too. Especially as Mrs V's own responses to Wise were unlikely to support that she was falling for such a scam, which makes it considerably harder for Wise to provide an appropriate warning.

I've also considered Mrs V's points about the disparity between Wise's and Metro's approach. But I note it doesn't seem that Metro was able to prevent her losses either. And while I appreciate that Metro has refunded some of them, I don't think that's persuasive evidence that Wise ought to refund her too, when I don't think its error would've prevented her making the payments.

So, in conclusion, I've reached the same decision not to uphold Mrs V's complaint. For completeness, I've included my provisional findings again below.

Firstly, I'm sorry to read about how Mrs V was scammed and the effects this has had on her. She's clearly been a victim of manipulative, organised criminals. But my role here is to decide whether it's fair to hold Wise, as her account provider, responsible for her losses.

For payments like this, the starting position in law is that Mrs V is responsible for payments she made. And Wise has a duty to make the payments she tells it to.

But, as supported by the terms of the account, that doesn't preclude Wise from making fraud checks before making a payment. And, taking into account regulatory expectations and good industry practice, I'm satisfied that it should fairly and reasonably have done this in some circumstances.

Here, there were various payments to new payees in quick succession and for increasing amounts. I'm also mindful of Mrs V's inconsistent answers to Wise's questions about what the payments were for, and that it ultimately had suspicions of cryptocurrency trading. Taking this all into account, I'd have expected Wise to have gone further than a written warning at some point and spoken to Mrs V to establish what the payments were for.

I don't think I need to decide exactly when I'd have expected Wise to do this. That's because, had Wise intervened, I find it unlikely it would've unravelled the scam in Mrs V's eyes. That's because I think it's likely Mrs V wouldn't have been forthcoming about what the payment was for. That's bearing in mind how she was being coached by P on what to say – which resulted in her misleading Wise and Metro several times.

In considering this, I've thought about how Wise ought to have provided context about relevant scams to explain its line of questioning – and whether this would've unravelled the scam even if its questions didn't. In deciding what this ought to have covered, I've looked at how the payments appeared to Wise and that its predominant suspicions related to crypto trading. So I think it's fair to have expected Wise to have provided context about what crypto investment scams look like.

I've noted that Wise deactivated one of the beneficiary accounts on suspicion of an advance fee scam (like the one here). But it happened on the day Mrs V made the payment to it, and Wise's investigations were ongoing and had been appealed. So I think it's going too far to reasonably suggest that when Wise questioned Mrs V, it ought to have put this all together and warned her about online job scams too. I'd only have expected that to happen if Mrs V gave Wise information to be concerned about that – which, as I've said, I don't think she would've done.

With this in mind, and given how the hallmarks of a crypto investment scams weren't generally relevant to Mrs V's circumstances, I find it unlikely that any context that Wise ought to have provided would've resonated.

It follows that, while I think Wise ought to have stepped in at some point to establish the circumstances of these payments, I don't think the conversation would've unravelled the scam and stopped her from making further payments towards the scam. So I don't think it caused her losses here.

As well as whether Wise could've prevented her losses, I've considered whether it ought to have done more to recover them. But it seems that Mrs V was paying individuals in exchange for crypto via peer-to-peer services on a crypto exchange. So I find it unlikely any recovery would've been successful, as they seemingly gave her the crypto she paid for – and the funds were lost to the fraudsters afterwards when she transferred the funds to their crypto wallets. So I don't think Wise was likely to reasonably get her money back after the payments were made.

I realise this will be very disappointing for Mrs V. But for the reasons I've explained, I'm not satisfied Wise can be fairly blamed for her losses.

My final decision

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

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs V to accept or reject my decision before 16 July 2025.

Emma Szkolar
Ombudsman