

The complaint

Mr H has complained that Wise Payments Limited won't refund the money he lost after falling victim to a scam.

What happened

In 2024, Mr H unfortunately fell victim to a cryptocurrency investment scam. Not long after, he saw an advert on social media for a firm offering to recover his lost funds. They claimed they could recover a very large amount, but asked for various fees. This was actually a recovery scam.

Over the course of several days, Mr H made a number of payments from his Wise account to his own account at a cryptocurrency exchange, totalling around £6,000. He then bought crypto and sent it on to the scammers. They asked for further money and did not give him the funds they said they'd recovered.

A couple of months later, Mr H reported the scam to Wise. Wise didn't think they were liable for Mr H's loss.

Our Investigator looked into things independently and didn't uphold the complaint. Mr H's representatives asked for an ombudsman's final decision, so the complaint's 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 understand that Mr H fell victim to a scam, for which he has my sympathy. I appreciate this cannot have been an easy matter for him to face, and I appreciate why he would like his money back. It's worth keeping in mind that it's the scammers who are primarily responsible for their own scam, and it's the scammers who really owe Mr H his money back. But I can only look at what Wise are responsible for. Having carefully considered everything that both sides have said and provided, I can't fairly hold Wise liable for Mr H's loss. I'll explain why.

It's not in dispute that Mr H authorised the payments involved. So although he didn't intend for the money to end up with scammers, under the Payment Services Regulations he is liable for the loss in the first instance. And broadly speaking, Wise had an obligation to follow his instructions – the starting position in law is that e-money firms are expected to process payments which a customer authorises them to make.

Wise should have been on the lookout for payments which could be the result of fraud or scams, to help prevent them. But a balance must be struck between identifying and responding to potentially fraudulent payments, and ensuring there's minimal disruption to legitimate payments. I've thought carefully about whether Wise should have done more in Mr H's case.

However, I don't think the payments involved were quite so unusual or out of character that Wise needed to intervene. While the spending went to a crypto site, it was not quite so large or rapid at any given point that it needed to be of particular concern for this account. Mr H had used this payee before, this type of account was commonly intended for sending similar amounts, and his previous activity often consisted of spending similar amounts, so it wasn't especially out of character for this account. The payments were going to another account in Mr H's own name, they didn't form a particularly suspect pattern, and I can't see that Wise were aware that Mr H had recently been victim to a scam, nor of any other factors which should've prompted them to intervene.

I've then considered what Wise did to try to recover the money after Mr H told them about the scam. I'm afraid it wasn't possible for Wise to recover money which Mr H had already sent on in crypto from his crypto account. Then any funds still remaining in Mr H's crypto account were still available to him, so there was nothing more for Wise to do there. And as these were payments to Mr H's own crypto account in his control, they were not covered by the ASR rules or the CRM Code.

So while I'm very sorry to hear about what the scammers did to Mr H, I don't think Wise can fairly be held responsible for his loss. And so I can't fairly tell Wise to reimburse Mr H in this case.

My final decision

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

This final decision marks the end of our service's consideration of the case.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr H to accept or reject my decision before 3 November 2025.

Adam Charles
Ombudsman