DRN-5685272

The complaint

Miss B is complaining that Wise Payments Limited didn't do enough to prevent her from making payments to a scam.

What happened

Both parties are familiar with the circumstances, so I'll only summarise them here.

In December 2023 Miss B fell victim to a job scam. She's told us she was referred to the job scam as a way to make money after she was blackmailed. The scammer told her to make the payments through Wise, so she registered for an account and made the following transfers as part of the scam:

Date	Amount	Payee
10 December 2023	£50	Individual 1
11 December 2023	£60	Individual 2
12 December 2023	£60	Individual 3
12 December 2023	£30	Individual 3
13 December 2023	£100	Individual 4
13 December 2023	£60	Individual 4
13 December 2023	£400	Individual 5
13 December 2023	£1,100	Individual 5
14 December 2023	£655	Individual 6

Miss B also reported some payments to Wise which she says were made to the scam from other people's accounts. Wise told Miss B it hasn't reviewed these as part of her complaint as the payments weren't made from her own account and it hasn't been able to establish that the funds belonged to Miss B, but it's given some guidance about what it needs to review these transactions. For the avoidance of doubt my decision relates to the transfers from Miss B's account only as set out above.

Miss B reported the scam to Wise on 28 December 2023 and subsequently made a complaint about what had happened. Wise attempted to recover Miss B's funds but was only able to recover £0.19, which it returned to her.

Wise replied to Miss B's complaint to tell her it wouldn't be refunding the payments she made, so she brought her complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service. Our Investigator looked into the complaint, but she didn't think it should be upheld. She thought that Wise had done enough to intervene in the payments and warn Miss B, based on what she'd told them about the payments.

Miss B didn't agree. She said that the Investigator didn't properly take into account that she'd been put under pressure to lie by the scammer.

Miss 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 disappoint Miss B but I'm not upholding her complaint. I'll explain why.

When a payment is authorised, Wise has a duty to act on the payment instruction. But in some circumstances, it should take a closer look at the circumstances of the payment – for example, if it ought to be alert to a fraud risk, because the transaction is unusual, or looks out of character or suspicious. And if so, it should intervene, for example by contacting the customer directly, before releasing the payment. I'd expect any intervention to be proportionate to the circumstances of the payment.

But I've also kept in mind that Wise processes high volumes of transactions each day. There is a balance for it to find between allowing customers to be able to use their account and questioning transactions to confirm they're legitimate.

I agree with the Investigator that I wouldn't normally have expected Wise to have intervened in any of the payments Miss B made to the scam as set out above. Miss B's account had been newly opened so Wise would have been relying on generic indicators of a scam when deciding whether to intervene. The value of the payments Miss B made, while of course significant to her, weren't however significant in the context of the payments Wise processes every day and there wasn't anything about the destination of the payments which I would have expected to have caused Wise particular concern. Although some of the payments were made on the same day, they didn't escalate rapidly in frequency or value in the way which can sometimes indicate a scam is taking place. So, I don't think the payments ought to have caused Wise to be particularly alert to a heightened risk of financial harm to Miss B from a scam.

However, Wise did ask for a payment purpose for five of the payments and Miss B selected "*sending money to friends or family*." Wise then asked Miss B some more questions, and for each of these five payments she answered to confirm she'd met the person she was paying in real life and hadn't received an unexpected message asking for money. So, I don't think her answers would have caused Wise any concern. Wise then showed Miss B a screen saying her answers didn't suggest a common scam but explained it would be hard to get her money back in the event of a scam and suggested she talk to someone she trusts.

If Miss B had been open about the circumstances of the payments, then Wise could potentially have uncovered the scam but as it stands, I don't think Wise ought reasonably to have done any more than it did to warn Miss B about making the payments. I appreciate that Miss B was being put under pressure by the scammer, but Wise wasn't unreasonable to take her answers at face value here – especially bearing in mind there was nothing particularly suspicious about the payments. The warnings Miss B did receive apparently didn't resonate with her; they weren't tailored to the scam she was experiencing. But what Wise did here to warn Miss B was proportionate to the circumstances of the payments Miss B was making and the way she'd answered its questions about them.

I can also see that Wise did in fact intervene when it paused payments which Miss B was attempting to make to the scam on 14 December 2023 and asked her to provide some more information about the source of the funds. Miss B called Wise and had some conversations with it where she said she was making the payments to pay for goods and services related to her wedding abroad which was happening very soon afterwards. Miss B was able to make the payment of £655 on the same day, but other payments she attempted to make directly to the scam were returned. Shortly afterwards Wise deactivated Miss B's account.

I’ve thought about whether Wise could have done more during these conversations to probe Miss B about the circumstances of the payments, which could potentially have uncovered the scam. But overall, I don’t think what Wise did here was unreasonable given what it knew about the payments at that time, and what Miss B had told it about the payments. I’m also taking into account that Miss B’s bank did carry out a direct scam intervention the day after she spoke to Wise and again Miss B didn’t provide accurate information about what the payments were for, so the scam wasn’t uncovered. So, I don’t have any reason to think any further questioning from Wise during its conversations with Miss B would have resulted in a different outcome. I would assume from the way she was referred to the job scam that Miss B must have already had some concerns about whether it was legitimate, but from listening to the calls it’s clear she was determined to make the payments and I’m not convinced that she would have heeded any scam warning Wise may have given her in any event.

I’ve also thought about whether Wise could have done more to recover the funds once it knew about the scam. Wise did attempt to recover the funds here but unfortunately it was only able to recover £0.19. Wise says the majority of the funds had already been removed from the receiving accounts by the time Miss B reported what had happened (which isn’t unusual, because scammers usually move the funds on rapidly which prevents them being recovered).

Once again, I’m sorry to disappoint Miss B. As the victim of a cruel scam, I can understand why she’d think she should get her money back. But I don’t think Wise needed to do any more than it did to prevent her from making the payments, or if it had done more this would have resulted in a different outcome. So, I’ve not found that there are any grounds for me to direct Wise to refund the disputed payments to her.

My final decision

My final decision is that I’m not upholding Miss B’s complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I’m required to ask Miss B to accept or reject my decision before 29 August 2025.

Helen Sutcliffe
Ombudsman