

The complaint

Mr H is complaining that Wise Payments Limited didn't do enough to prevent him from making payments to a scam.

What happened

Both parties are familiar with the circumstances of the scam so I'll only summarise it briefly here.

In early 2024 Mr H fell victim to an investment scam after building up an online relationship with someone I'll refer to as "the scammer."

Mr H opened an account with Wise and made the following payments, by transfer, on the scammer's instructions. The payments were made to buy cryptocurrency from different individuals which Mr H then transferred to the scam.

Date	Amount
29 February 2024	£1,000
1 March 2024	£400
2 March 2024	£1,260
7 March 2024	£1,220
7 March 2024	£612

In July 2024 Mr H complained to Wise about what had happened. But Wise didn't uphold his complaint.

Mr H brought his complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service. Our Investigator looked into what had happened, but they didn't think Wise should have done anything else to prevent Mr H from making the payments.

Mr H didn't agree so his complaint has 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 Mr H but I'm not upholding his complaint, for much the same reasons as the Investigator.

It's not in dispute that Mr H authorised the payments, and Wise does have a duty to act on his instructions. But in some circumstances, Wise should take a closer look at the circumstances of the payments – 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 payments. 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.

Mr H opened his account with Wise as part of the scam – so it didn't have much information to be able to decide if the payments were out of character for him (although it was aware that Mr H had stated that the reason for opening the account was to “*buy goods or services abroad*”). But broadly, it would have been relying on generic indicators of a scam risk when deciding whether to intervene. And having considered the value and destination of the payments, I'm not persuaded Wise ought to have found any of the payments suspicious, such that it ought to have made enquires of Mr H before processing them.

This is because none of the payments were of a value where I'd expect Wise to be concerned about Mr H being at risk of financial harm from a scam. The disputed payments also weren't made in quick succession in the way that can sometimes indicate a scam may be taking place.

At the time the payments were made I'd expect Wise to have been aware of the increased risk to its customers of multistage fraud, often including payments to cryptocurrency. But I don't think Wise would have been able to identify that these payments were to buy cryptocurrency from the information it had available to it at the time.

However, Wise did in fact intervene in all of the disputed payments, by asking Mr H why he was making them. Mr H chose the option of “*buying goods and services*” rather than “*making an investment*” (which is what he was instructed to do by the scammer). For each of the payments Wise went on to ask Mr H if he'd checked reviews, which he confirmed he had. He also confirmed he wasn't buying the goods from various websites where the risk of a scam may be higher. And for each payment Wise then gave Mr H a general warning about the risk of scams and suggested he talk to someone he trusts.

Having considered how Mr H answered Wise's questions about the payments, I'm satisfied that it wouldn't have been proportionate for Wise to have done anything else to question Mr H about what was happening here. Wise's questions about the payments and the general warning it gave on each payment didn't resonate with Mr H – perhaps unsurprisingly, as it wasn't relevant to the investment scam he was experiencing. But this doesn't mean Wise's actions weren't proportionate in all the circumstances.

Wise has told us that by the time the scam was reported there were no funds available in the receiving accounts for it to recover. But in any event, I don't think recovery would ever have been possible here, as the payments Mr H made were to buy cryptocurrency from apparently legitimate sellers, and it was only after this that the cryptocurrency he'd bought was transferred to the scam and lost.

Once again, I'm sorry to disappoint Mr H. But I don't think Wise ought reasonably to have done any more to prevent the payments he made. So, it wouldn't be fair or reasonable for me to direct Wise to refund the payments.

My final decision

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

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr H to accept or reject my decision before 25 August 2025.

Helen Sutcliffe
Ombudsman