

The complaint

Miss W complains that Wise Payments Limited trading as Wise failed to provide her with adequate protection from an investment scam. She wants her losses refunded along with 8% interest and £300 compensation.

Miss W is represented by a third party but for ease of reference I have referred to Miss W throughout this decision.

What happened

Miss W met a man (from herein referred to as 'the scammer') on a dating site in November 2023. She said they spent time messaging and getting to know each other and on 25 November 2023 moved their conversations to a messaging app. She said that trust had been built between them by this stage and a close relationship had been established.

The scammer explained that he traded in his free time and suggested he could teach Miss W. Miss W explained that she had seen media coverage about cryptocurrency and trading and that it was a good time to invest and given the rising costs of living she thought this was an opportunity for her. She said she trusted the scammer and that he appeared very knowledgeable about investing. She said the scammer said he used Wise and assisted her in setting up a trading account on what she believed to be a legitimate platform. Miss W initially invested £200 from her current account into a cryptocurrency account under the supervision of the scammer and then with his help put the money into the scam application. She said the information she received showed she made a profit and as she believed the application to be legitimate, and she had full control over her accounts she made further investments.

Miss W said that when she tried to withdraw her money, she encountered issues. She raised this with the scammer and his communication became less frequent until he stopped responding. At this point Miss W said she realised she had been the victim of a sophisticated scam.

Wise issued a final response dated 18 June 2025. It explained that when Miss W contacted it her account was deactivated. On 15 January 2024, it refunded Miss W the remaining £3,500 to Miss W's external account. Miss W lodged a complaint, and the first final response was issued on 21 February 2024. A new complaint was then lodged which included an additional payment. It said that it completed Miss W's transfer orders as directed and didn't have any reason at the time to believe that the receiving accounts were engaging in fraud. Wise didn't uphold Miss W's complaint.

Miss W referred her complaint to this service.

This complaint was initially investigated based on the following transactions which Miss W said were part of the scam.

Date	Amount
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5 January 2024	£2,000
7 January 2024	£1,000
8 January 2024	£2,000
8 January 2024	£1,300

Our investigator accepted that the payments had been made as part of a scam but wasn't persuaded that Wise was at fault by processing the payments. They thought Wise took reasonable action to try to recover the funds following contact from Miss W, but unfortunately the money had been withdrawn from the receiving bank accounts before Wise was made aware of the scam. Therefore, the complaint wasn't upheld.

Miss W responded to the initial view and explained that another payment had been made on 6 January 2024 for US\$5,289.50 and asking for the case to be reviewed in light of this. Another investigator reviewed the case, including the additional transaction. They agreed the outcome set out in our first investigator's view and focussed their investigation on the additional payment. Having done so, they didn't think that there were sufficient grounds for Wise to think that Miss W was at financial harm from fraud when she made the payment to necessitate Wise blocking the transaction or making contact. Therefore, they didn't uphold this complaint.

Miss W didn't accept our investigator's view. She said that she set up the account and made payments to five new payees within a very short space of time. She said this level of activity and the amounts involved should have prompted Wise to conduct further checks or issue a warning to Miss W about the potential risks of fraud and scams.

As a resolution hasn't been agreed, this complaint has been passed to me, an ombudsman, to issue 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 really sorry to hear about the impact this scam has had on Miss W's health and financial circumstances, and I do not underestimate how distressing this experience has been. I also note that Miss W was looking to source evidence of the funds that she used for the payments but in this case, I find that I have sufficient evidence to make a decision and having considered everything that has been provided, I do not find I can say that Wise should be required to refund Miss W's losses. I have set out my reasons for this below.

This complaint relates to the following transactions that Miss W has raised as being part of a scam. Miss W made further payments on the 11 January 2024, but these were cancelled and the money refunded to Miss W.

Transaction	Date	Beneficiary	Amount
1	5 January 2024	Individual A	£2,000
2	6 January 2024	Individual B	US\$5,289.50

3	7 January 2024	Individual C	£1,000
4	8 January 2024	Individual D	£2,000
5	8 January 2024	Individual E	£1,300

Miss W authorised the payments and under the Payment Service Regulations 2017, the starting point is that she is liable for the payments she authorised. However, Wise should have systems in place to look out for out of character or unusual transactions, or other signs that might indicate that its customers are at risk of fraud.

Miss W opened her Wise account on 2 December 2023. When she set up the account, she said her expected annual volume would be between £50,001 and £150,000, so I think it reasonable that Wise wouldn't be unduly concerned by sizeable payments being made through the account. Wise has confirmed that all of the payments were made to Wise customers with no prior red flags or concerns. However, I have looked at the details and pattern of the transactions to see if there were reasons that meant Wise should have taken further actions before releasing the payments.

Miss W made the first payment on 5 January 2024. As this wasn't long after she had set up the account, there wasn't account history for Wise to use to establish a usual pattern of transaction behaviour. The first payment was for £1,000 and I do not think this was a value that meant further checks were needed. The payment was made to another Wise account holder for which no concerns had been made. Therefore, I do not think there were reasons that meant Wise should have intervened before the payment was made.

Miss W made a second payment, this time in USD. While this was a different currency to that used for the first payment, Wise is an international money transfer platform, so I do not find the use of two major currencies for transfers should have raised additional concerns.

Further were payments made on 7 and 8 January and while these were being made in close succession, I do not think the timing suggested Miss W was being pressured into making the transactions. The individual transaction values were not of a size that I think meant a human intervention was needed and I note the payments were being made to different individuals and the amounts weren't escalating.

That said, Miss W had set up a new account and when she started to use it, she made a series of five transactions within a few days. Therefore, I think it would be reasonable for Wise to have sent her a warning to alert her to the possibility of a scam. Wise has provided details that show a warning was sent on 8 January 2024, which raised the possibility of the payment being a scam. Miss W was required to enter the purpose of the transfer, and she put '*sending money to herself*'. Further information was then provided questioning whether Miss W had been asked to move the money or if she felt rushed or pressured into moving the money, but Miss W decided to proceed with the payment. In this case, I think Wise did provide a reasonable intervention at this stage, but Miss W wanted to make the payment.

At the time of the payments being made, Miss W believed she was in a relationship with the scammer and that she was making genuine investments. I note her comment about Wise needing to do more to protect her but in this case, I think the warning was reasonable. That said, I have considered whether further warnings would have changed the outcome and, on balance, given the relationship at the time between Miss W and the scammer, and noting the information the scammer was giving her, I think that additional warnings would have been unlikely to stop her making the payments.

By the time Wise was alerted to the scam, the payments Miss W had made had already been transferred out of the receiving accounts. Therefore, there was no more that Wise could do to recover the money.

So, for the reasons set out above, I do not uphold this complaint.

My final decision

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss W to accept or reject my decision before 2 December 2025.

Jane Archer
Ombudsman