

The complaint

Mr L has complained that Barclays Bank UK PLC won't refund the money he lost after falling victim to a scam.

What happened

In summary, in 2021, a long-standing acquaintance introduced Mr L to a cryptocurrency investment scheme. Unfortunately, the scheme later turned out to be a scam.

Over the course of about eight months, Mr L paid around £15,000 from his Barclays account into his own cryptocurrency accounts. He bought crypto, and he says he then sent it on to the scammers' scheme.

In 2025, Mr L complained about this to Barclays via representatives. Barclays didn't refund the stated loss, and he came to our service.

Our Investigator looked into things independently and didn't uphold the complaint. Mr L'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 L fell victim to a scam, for which he has my sympathy. I appreciate that such scams are often not easy matters to face, and I appreciate why he'd want to recover money lost to a scam. It's worth keeping in mind that it'd be the scammers who'd primarily be responsible for their own scam, and it'd be the scammer who'd really owe Mr L his money back. But I can only look at what Barclays are responsible for.

First, I must point out that while Mr L has provided evidence that he fell victim to a scam, we've not been given sufficient evidence that all the disputed payments were lost to a scam. We only have evidence to link some of the payments to a scam, and it appears that Mr L was making other genuine crypto-related transactions. So for all I can know, the other payments may have been for genuine investments, or may have been sent to another wallet of Mr L's or a friend's, or may have been used to purchase goods or services, and so on. So I couldn't fairly hold Barclays liable for the entire stated loss here.

With that said, even if I were to conclude that all these payments were lost to a scam, I'm afraid I still couldn't reasonably hold Barclays responsible for that loss. I'll explain why.

It's not in dispute that Mr L 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 his own payments and a resulting loss in the first instance. And broadly speaking, Barclays had an obligation to follow his instructions – the starting position in law is that banks are expected to process payments which a customer authorises them to make.

Barclays 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 Barclays should have done more in Mr L's case.

Here, I don't think the payments involved were quite so concerning that Barclays needed to intervene. While they were going to crypto sites, Barclays weren't quite as on-notice back then about crypto scams as they were in later years, and the spending was never quite so large or rapid as to have been of particular concern even in view of the payee. The spending didn't follow any particularly suspect pattern. Further, it was going to accounts in Mr L's own name, and by the time the spending got larger – though still not concerningly large – Mr L had been making these sorts of transactions over some months and had received money back. Overall, I don't think that Barclays needed to intervene in this particular case.

I've then considered what Barclays did to try to recover the money after Mr L told them about the scam. As these were payments to Mr L's own crypto accounts, they were not covered by the CRM code. For the money sent by card, it was too late to do a chargeback, and there was no chargeback reason which would've been appropriate here or realistically likely to have worked. It wasn't possible for Barclays to recover funds which Mr L had already sent on in crypto, and any money remaining in his crypto account was still his, so there was nothing more for Barclays to do there.

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

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 Mr L to accept or reject my decision before 8 December 2025.

Adam Charles
Ombudsman