

The complaint

Mr H is complaining about National Westminster Bank Public Limited Company because it declined to refund money he lost as a result of fraud.

What happened

Sadly, Mr H fell victim to a cruel investment scam. After seeing an advert on social media, he was added to an online chat group where investors were being encouraged to invest in a particular stock. It appears the scammers were pushing up the price of the stock before withdrawing their own funds, leading to the price crashing and Mr H and other victims losing their money.

Between January and April 2024, Mr H used his NatWest account to make the following transfers to an investment broker that were used to purchase the stock before his money was lost to the scam:

No.	Date	Amount £
1	10 Jan	100
2	16 Jan	2,100
3	28 Jan	6,300
4	29 Jan	2,194
5	30 Jan	200
6	6 Feb	300
7	19 Feb	1,200
8	12 Apr	10,000
9	22 Apr	963.38

Our investigator didn't recommend the complaint be upheld. Crucially, he didn't think the payments were sufficiently unusual that NatWest should have identified Mr H may be falling victim to a scam.

Mr H didn't accept the investigator's assessment. He said he expected better support given this was clearly a scam and that he wanted to take his complaint further.

The complaint has now been referred to me for review.

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.

Having done so, I've reached the same overall conclusions as the investigator. I haven't necessarily commented on every single point raised but concentrated instead on the issues I believe are central to the outcome of the complaint. This is consistent with our established role as an informal alternative to the courts. In considering this complaint I've had regard to the relevant law and regulations; any regulator's rules, guidance and standards, codes of practice, and what I consider was good industry practice at the time.

Research appears to show the stock Mr H has referred to was associated with the type of scam he's described and the evidence he's been able to provide seems to show he was a victim of that scam.

There's no dispute that Mr H authorised these payments. In broad terms, the starting position at law is that a bank is expected to process payments a customer authorises it to make, in accordance with the Payment Services Regulations and the terms and conditions of their account. In this context, '*authorised*' essentially means the customer gave the business an instruction to make a payment from their account. In other words, they knew that money was leaving their account, irrespective of where that money actually went.

There are, however, some situations where we believe a business, taking into account relevant rules, codes and best practice standards, shouldn't have taken its customer's authorisation instruction at 'face value' – or should have looked at the wider circumstances surrounding the transaction before making the payment.

NatWest also has a duty to exercise reasonable skill and care, pay due regard to the interests of its customers and to follow good industry practice to keep customers' accounts safe. This includes identifying vulnerable consumers who may be particularly susceptible to scams and looking out for payments which might indicate the consumer is at risk of financial harm.

Taking these things into account, I need to decide whether NatWest acted fairly and reasonably in its dealings with Mr H.

The payments

I must take into account that many similar payment instructions NatWest receives will be entirely legitimate and I also need to consider its responsibility to make payments promptly.

Having considered what NatWest knew about the payments at the time, I'm not persuaded it ought to have been particularly concerned about them. While some of the payments were significant, they were spread out over a period of time. Also, they went to an investment broker rather than to a cryptocurrency exchange for example, which are more commonly associated with many types of known scam.

Perhaps more importantly, a review of his bank statements shows Mr H was in the habit of making payments to another investment broker that don't form part of this complaint. Between June 2023 and April 2024, I counted as many as 12 separate payments totalling around £40,000. The statements also appear to show he received a large credit from a broker in January 2024. So it would have appeared to NatWest that Mr H was an experienced investor and, against this backdrop, I don't think the payments involved in this complaint would have appeared unusual or out of character for his account.

Based on the circumstances of the payments, I don't think there were sufficient grounds for NatWest to suspect Mr H may be at risk of harm from fraud and I can't reasonably say it was at fault for processing them in line with his instructions.

I want to be clear that it's not my intention to suggest Mr H is to blame for what happened in any way. He fell victim to a sophisticated scam that was carefully designed to deceive and manipulate its victims. I can understand why he acted in the way he did. But my role is to consider the actions of NatWest and, having done so, I'm not persuaded these were the cause of his losses.

Recovery of funds

I've also looked at whether NatWest could or should have done more to try and recover Mr H's losses once it was aware that the payments were the result of fraud.

Mr H made the payments to an account with a broker in his own name before purchasing the relevant stock, so he didn't pay the scammers directly. This means he's not entitled to a refund under the industry reimbursement scheme. It also means NatWest could only try to recover funds from Mr H's account with the broker but it appears the money had already been moved on. If not, anything that was left would still have been available to him to access. In the circumstances, I don't think anything that NatWest could have done differently would likely have led to his money being successfully recovered.

In conclusion

I recognise Mr H has been the victim of a cruel scam and I'm sorry he lost this money. I realise the outcome of this complaint will come as a great disappointment but, for the reasons I've explained, I think NatWest acted fairly and reasonably in its dealings with him and I won't be telling it to make any refund.

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 Mr H to accept or reject my decision before 16 December 2025.

James Biles
Ombudsman