

The complaint

Miss G complains that Wise Payments Limited didn't do enough to prevent her losing money to a scam.

Miss G was initially helped with her complaint by a representative who has since ceased acting for her. But, for ease of reading, I'll mostly just refer to Miss G herself where I also mean her former representative.

What happened

The detailed background to this complaint is well known to both parties. So, I'll only provide an overview of some of the key events here. In 2023 Miss G was sadly the victim of a 'job scam'. She found what she believed was a genuine opportunity for remote work. This involved her leaving reviews online for various products for which she was to be paid a commission. But in order to be paid, she first had to purchase cryptocurrency and send this to the scam work platform.

Miss G made a series of payments from her Wise account for the purchase of cryptocurrency which she says was then sent on and lost to the scam. This was a combination of payments to cryptocurrency exchanges and peer to peer sellers. The payments relevant to this complaint took place across September and October 2023 from Miss G's Wise account. They ranged in value from an equivalent value of around £20 (paid in a different currency) up to around £3,355. Together they totalled over £27,000.

Miss G says that when she found she had to pay more to release cryptocurrency back to her, she realised she'd been scammed. She reported this to Wise in December 2023. Ultimately Wise didn't offer any redress and the complaint was considered by one of our Investigators. She didn't think we could consider all of Miss G's complaint (she concluded some of the payments fell outside our jurisdiction). And for what she could consider, she didn't recommend that the complaint should be upheld. Miss G disagreed and asked for an Ombudsman to review her complaint.

I didn't agree with what our Investigator had said about our jurisdiction. So, I contacted both Miss G and Wise and set out my thoughts in that regard which was that I could consider all the payments Miss G had made towards the scam. But, I also set out why I wasn't persuaded that the complaint should be upheld. I've copied part of what I sent to both parties below.

"Wise's initial obligation is to process the payment instructions received from their customers like Miss G. But they are also required to be alert to the potential for fraud, scams and the misappropriation of funds and to do what they fairly can to protect their customers from the same. I also think its reasonable that there is a level of proportionality as to what can fairly be expected. Wise can't be involved in every payment and there is a balance to be struck between stopping and checking payments and allowing customers ready access to their funds."

For much the same reasons that our Investigator has already explained, I don't think a reasonable level of intervention by Wise would've made a difference to the position Miss G finds herself in. I agree that throughout the course of the payments Miss G made, there was a point at which I think it would've been appropriate for Wise to have intervened and done more.

When Miss G made multiple payments to cryptocurrency exchanges in a single day and the combined value of this was over £2,700 (as she did on 27 September 2023) I think this ought to have given Wise cause for concern. Prior to the date of the payments, the FCA and Action Fraud had both warned that cryptocurrency is involved in a great number of scams. And I think by the time of the final payment on that day there was enough going on that I'd have expected Wise to have asked Miss G questions about the payments she was making and to have provided an appropriate warning based on how she'd answered (as well as warning about common cryptocurrency investment scams). I don't think Miss G would've disclosed that she was making payments towards a 'job' or to release her wages. I say this as when Wise did later ask her the purpose of some of her payments (something I'll come to again below), she told them she was paying 'Friends and Family' when she was actually purchasing cryptocurrency from people she didn't know. Miss G has also advised that she was told "banks don't really like cryptocurrency" and was advised not to tell Wise the true purpose of her payments. Due to this, I think she would've answered in such a way that wouldn't have given Wise further concerns. And I don't think the warning about cryptocurrency investment scams that I think should've been given would've been impactful. I say this for the simple reason that this wasn't the type of scam that Miss G was in the process of falling for.

Our Investigator also thought Wise should've intervened on 18 October 2023 when Miss G sent four transfers. The transfers each went to different (new) payees. The payments were for £2,000, £2,000, £1,215 and £1,672 and they were sent over the course of around two and a half hours. For three of these transfers, Wise asked the purpose and Miss G said they were transfers to family and friends. Wise asked further questions and Miss G confirmed she had met those she was paying in real life and that she hadn't been unexpectedly contacted and asked for money. Given the nature of the multicurrency account that Miss G held with Wise which wouldn't necessarily be expected to operate in the same way as a regular bank account, I'm not sure that it was unreasonable for Wise not to have done more than they did in relation to those payments.

But even if I'm wrong on this point and Wise should have done more, again the available evidence suggests that Miss G wouldn't have shared the true reasons behind her payments. It would've required her to have admitted that the payments weren't to pay friends or family, to have disclosed that they were actually to purchase cryptocurrency on a peer-to-peer basis and that the reason for this was to make deposits to enable the release of her funds for an online job. I don't think this is more likely than not what would've happened. The available evidence suggests otherwise, particularly when one of the options available for the payment purpose (which I appreciate Miss G has said she doesn't remember seeing) was "paying to earn money by working online". Miss G didn't select this option and also wasn't truthful with Wise about the purpose of her payments and having met those she was paying. So even if Wise had probed further, I think it's more likely than not that she would've answered in a way that would've reassured Wise so her payments could've continued. I don't think Wise would've known that these payments were being used to buy cryptocurrency (peer-to-peer) and I don't think they'd have had a reasonable basis upon which they should've disbelieved Miss G. I acknowledge that Wise should be alert to the possibility of their customers being coached as to what to say. And that I can't know with absolute certainty what would've happened. I can only base my decision on the available evidence, which as I've set out doesn't support that Wise would've ever ended up in a position where they could've appropriately warned Miss G about the job scam she was a victim of.

For completeness, I also don't think the steps Wise took in relation to any of the other payments made to the scam were insufficient or that there were failures that impacted the loss suffered by Miss G.

As all the payments involved in this scam went to cryptocurrency which Miss G says was passed to the scammers, I don't think anything Wise did or didn't do would've impacted whether a recovery could've been made. I also don't think there was poor service such that a compensation award should be made in this case."

I then set out my intention to close the complaint informally if both parties were in agreement. Wise didn't provide a response. Miss G's representative withdrew at this point, but Miss G herself provided some further comments that she would like to be considered and which I'll address below.

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.

Miss G says that Wise failed to intervene appropriately in the payments she was making to mitigate the risk of scams. She also believes the questions asked and warnings provided were inadequate. I've considered this but as I've set out above, there were numerous instances of Wise intervening in the payments made. I appreciate Miss G thinks the questions asked were superficial, but to an extent, Wise can't know the purpose of a payment without being informed of this by their customer. And Miss G predominantly didn't tell Wise the true situation when asked about her payments. Where payments were identifiably going to cryptocurrency exchanges, I'd have expected Wise to have warned about common cryptocurrency investment scams. But it isn't possible for Wise to address every potential type of scam (attempting to do so would reduce the impact of any individual warning) and at the time of Miss G's payments, I don't think they ought to have given a job scam warning as a matter of course in response to payments identifiably going to cryptocurrency.

Miss G also says that my finding that a more detailed intervention wouldn't have made a difference is speculative and an assumption. Respectfully, I don't agree. Clearly I can never know with 100% certainty what would've happened. And accordingly, I have to make my finding on the basis of the available evidence. I find the evidence of what did actually happen to be more persuasive than what Miss G now says would've happened. And that evidence is that when asked, Miss G concealed the reason for her payments from Wise. So I don't think a more detailed intervention would've worked out differently with Miss G sharing more to allow more appropriate and tailored warnings to have been given.

Miss G also set out in some detail the impact the scam has had on her. And she obviously has my sympathy as a victim of crime. I do acknowledge and accept that scammers are devious and skilled in the way they target their victims. But the vast majority of the impact on Miss G was caused by the actions of the cruel scammers, not Wise. And as I don't think Wise failed in a way that was causal to the loss she has suffered, there isn't a reasonable basis upon which I can require them to pay compensation or otherwise do more as Miss G would like.

My final decision

For the reasons outlined above, my final decision is that I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss G to accept or reject my decision before 27 November 2025.

Richard Annandale
Ombudsman