

## **The complaint**

Mr W has complained that Wise Payments Limited won't refund the money he lost after falling victim to a scam.

## **What happened**

In summary, in 2022 Mr W found a cryptocurrency investment scheme, which unfortunately was a scam. The scammer offered to invest and trade on Mr W's behalf, presenting a platform which looked professional.

In order to fund the investment, Mr W opened an account with Wise using his contact details, his photo ID, and a matching photo of him taken live from his device. He granted the scammer access to make payments on his behalf. On one day, nearly £10,000 was sent to other individuals, who appear to have been selling cryptocurrency. From what Mr W has said, it seems that any such crypto was ultimately sent to the scammer.

Mr W later tried to withdraw his investment, but the scammer demanded further funds, then ultimately cut contact.

In 2025, Mr W complained to Wise about the scam via representatives. Wise explained that they sympathised but didn't think they were liable for Mr W's loss.

Our Investigator looked into things independently and didn't uphold the complaint. Mr W'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 W fell victim to a scam, for which he has my sympathy. I appreciate this cannot have been an easy matter for him to face, and I appreciate why he would like his money back. It's worth keeping in mind that it's the scammer who is primarily responsible for their own scam, and it's the scammer who really owes Mr W his money back. But I can only look at what Wise are responsible for. Having carefully considered everything that both sides have said and provided, I can't fairly hold Wise liable for Mr W's loss. I'll explain why.

It's not in dispute that these payments were authorised – from what Mr W's representatives have told us, he granted the scammer access to his account and they made the payments for him. So although he didn't intend for the money to end up with a scammer, under the Payment Services Regulations he is liable for the loss in the first instance. And broadly speaking, Wise had an obligation to follow his instructions – the starting position in law is that e-money firms are expected to process the authorised payments that they've been told to make.

Wise 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 Wise should have done more in Mr W's case.

While this was a substantial amount to lose in total – again, Mr W has my sympathy there – this type of remittance account was commonly intended for substantial transfers. And it was newly opened, so Wise didn't have any historic activity to compare this to – for all they knew, this might've been usual for Mr W. With that said, given factors like the speed of the payments and the potential detection of screen sharing, I do think Wise should've provided automated written warnings tailored to questions about the payments.

However, even if Wise had done so, it seems more likely than not that this wouldn't have stopped the loss. I say this because from what Mr W's representatives have said, it was the scammer – rather than Mr W himself – who was physically putting the payments through for him, and the scammer simply bypassed the warnings already provided. It doesn't seem likely that the scammer would've answered the questions particularly honestly or shown Mr W any warnings long enough for him to really read or digest them. It's more likely that the scammer would've answered in a way that would provide irrelevant warnings which wouldn't resonate with Mr W, and/or that they'd continue to bypass any shown warnings as quickly as possible before Mr W could really take them in. And given that Mr W trusted the scammer so much that he let them operate his account on his behalf, it seems even less likely that written warnings would've broken the scammer's spell in this particular case. Overall, I think it's most likely that reasonable, proportionate intervention would not have stopped the loss in this case, and so I cannot fairly hold Wise liable on those grounds.

I've then considered what Wise did to try to recover the money after Mr W told them about the scam. It looks like these payments went to crypto traders, rather than directly to the actual scammer. And the traders would've presumably provided the crypto they were paid to provide, in which case there'd be no realistic claim against them. Even if not: by the time the scam was reported to Wise, the money had left those accounts long before, so it was much too late to recover it in any case. And I'm afraid there was nothing more that Wise could've reasonably done to get the money back here.

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

**My final decision**

For the reasons I've explained, I don't uphold this complaint.

This final decision marks the end of our service's consideration of the case.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr W to accept or reject my decision before 12 January 2026.

Adam Charles  
**Ombudsman**