

The complaint

Mr M complains that Santander UK Plc won't refund money he lost to a scam.

What happened

Mr M fell victim to a job scam. As part of the scam, Mr M made six debit card payments totalling about £5,000 to an international money transfer provider – which I'll refer to as 'L' - between 25 and 28 March 2025. The funds were then forwarded on from L to the scam.

Mr M realised he'd been scammed when the scammer kept on asking for more money. And with the assistance of a third party, Mr M complained to Santander saying they didn't do enough to protect him from the scam. Santander rejected the complaint.

The complaint was brought to the Financial Ombudsman, but our Investigator thought Santander had acted fairly. And so, he didn't think they had to refund Mr M.

Mr M disagreed with our Investigator. The matter has been passed to me 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'm sorry Mr M has been the victim of a scam. I realise it is a significant amount of money he has lost and so, I understand why he is doing everything he can to recover it. But just because a scam has occurred doesn't mean Mr M is automatically entitled to a refund by Santander. It would only be fair for me to tell Santander to reimburse Mr M if I thought they were responsible for his loss, or that if I considered they hindered the recovery of the funds. Having carefully considered this, I don't think Santander has acted unfairly by not providing a refund. I'll explain why.

These payments aren't covered by the Payment Systems Regulator's mandatory reimbursement scheme – as it doesn't include debit card transactions. I've therefore considered whether it would otherwise be fair and reasonable to hold Santander responsible for Mr M's loss.

It isn't disputed that Mr M authorised the payments from his Santander account. Generally, consumers are liable for payments they authorise and Santander are also expected to process authorised payment instructions without undue delay. However, taking into account the regulatory rules and guidance, relevant codes of practice and good industry practice, including the Consumer Duty, there are circumstances where it might be appropriate for Santander to take additional steps or make additional checks before processing a payment to help protect customers from the possibility of financial harm from fraud.

I've considered whether the payment instructions given by Mr M to Santander (either individually or collectively) were unusual enough to have expected additional checks to be carried out before they were processed.

When considering this, I've kept in mind that Santander process high volumes of transactions each day. And that there is a balance for Santander to find between allowing customers to be able to use their account and questioning transactions to confirm they're legitimate – as it wouldn't be practical for Santander to carry out additional checks before processing every payment.

The payments were all relatively low in value – with the highest being £1,500. And so, I don't think there was a heightened risk of financial harm associated with the payments based on their individual value. However, by the point of the sixth payment, Mr M had sent about £5,000 across a four-day period – with the last three transactions, totalling about £4,200, sent in less than five hours on 28 March 2025. And given the funds were being sent to an international money transfer provider, which are sometimes used as part of multi-stage scams, I think there was enough reason for Santander to suspect Mr M could be at risk of financial harm when the final payment was made. So, I think it would've been reasonable for Santander to carry out checks before processing this payment.

Santander have shown that they did this, as they spoke with Mr M to discuss the surrounding circumstances of the payment. I've therefore thought about whether their checks were proportionate to risk associated with the payment. Having done so, I think it was. This is because:

- Santander made Mr M aware that the payment had been flagged up as a potential scam.
- When asked what the payment was for, Mr M said he was sending funds to his sister that was abroad. Mr M also confirmed he had spoken with his sister over the phone opposed to, for example, relying on a text message.
- Santander specifically asked Mr M whether anyone had informed him to say the payment was for a family member, even though it isn't. Or whether anybody had put him under pressure or told him what to say to his them?

Mr M denied this or having any conversation with strangers – despite his WhatsApp conversation with the scammer showing he was told, in order to ensure the *“transfer will be more likely to go through smoothly”*, to say it was *“for a relative or family”* and *“not to mention anything about work”*.

- Mr M reassured Santander that he was *“pretty clued up on security”* as it's what he does for work.

I understand Mr M doesn't think Santander did enough, as he's said that at no point during the call did they alert him to it being a scam. While I've noted Mr M's views on this, I disagree. I think Santander made it sufficiently clear that the purpose of the call was to discuss the payment that they'd flagged as potentially being made in relation to a scam. And I think Santander took reasonable steps to understand the surrounding circumstances of the payment to establish if Mr M was at risk of financial harm. Unfortunately, due to Mr M not providing accurate information, Santander were prevented from this. I appreciate Mr M was told by the scammer to withhold the true circumstances of the payment to ensure it was processed. While I sympathise with Mr M, I can't fairly hold Santander responsible for that. They were reliant on Mr M providing accurate information and engaging positively with their fraud prevention checks. And based on Mr M's responses, I don't think they had enough reason to suspect the payment was being made for anything other than legitimate purposes.

Santander also provided Mr M with some of the common features of impersonation scams. I think this was reasonable in the circumstances as, based on what Mr M told them, Santander couldn't have identified the payments were being made to a job scam. Instead, an impersonation scam was the most likely scam scenario in this situation. Because of this, I think Santander took proportionate steps to protect Mr M from the possibility of financial

harm from fraud. It follows that I think it was reasonable for Santander to process the payment upon receiving Mr M's instruction that he wished to proceed.

I've also thought about whether Santander could've done anything to recover Mr M's funds, but I don't think they could. The only option of recovery for the debit card payments was via chargeback. But L had provided the service paid for – that being the transfer of funds, which he exchanged into another currency, to a recipient in another country. As L provided the service expected from them, there wasn't any reasonable prospect of a chargeback claim being successful here – as L would've been able to defend it.

I appreciate Mr M is the innocent victim of a scam. I'm not placing any blame with him for what's happened or the loss that he has suffered. But I must consider whether Santander is responsible for it. And although I know Mr M will be disappointed by this outcome, I don't think Santander are. For the above reasons, I think Santander has acted fairly and so I'm not going to tell them to do anything further.

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 M to accept or reject my decision before 2 March 2026.

Daniel O'Dell
Ombudsman