

The complaint

Mr A complains that Metro Bank Plc (as the recipient bank) didn't do enough to prevent him from losing money to what he says was a scam.

Mr A has used a representative to bring his complaint. But, for ease of reading, I'll mostly just refer to Mr A where I also mean his 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. Mr A says that he used an individual I'll refer to as 'Mr M' as an accountant. He understood that Mr M would submit his tax payment for him in the country in which he lived. With this in mind, he made a payment of around €22,900 from his account with another bank. The payment credited Mr M's Metro Bank account in August 2024 as £19,128.40.

Mr A says he received an official receipt which looked genuine, as well as what appeared to be an email confirming the payment to the tax officials. However, he says he later heard that Mr M had passed away and he verified that the payment hadn't been applied to his tax account. He believes he's been a victim of a scam and is seeking redress from Metro Bank.

In February 2025 Mr A complained to Metro Bank. Metro Bank didn't agree they'd done anything wrong and didn't offer any redress. The matter was referred to our service and one of our Investigators didn't recommend that the complaint should be upheld. Mr A disagrees and has asked for an Ombudsman to review his complaint.

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 agree with the outcome reached by our Investigator and for similar reasons. I know this will be disappointing for Mr A, so I'll explain why.

Firstly, it's difficult to establish with absolute certainty Mr M's intentions when accepting Mr A's payment from him. There is evidence to suggest that he would make payments to international tax authorities as he said he would. Although I do acknowledge that I'm aware of other linked complaints where others suggest he didn't do as promised either. And whilst I don't know the exact circumstances surrounding this, I have seen evidence to support that Mr M passed away in October 2024 (only two months after Mr A's payment). It is possible that he intended to pay Mr A's taxes as agreed when accepting the payment. But I agree the provision of evidence of a payment which doesn't appear to have been made to tax authorities, is a concerning factor. Either way, unless it could be said that Mr A's payment represented the misappropriation of funds (something I don't feel I need to address to decide this complaint), I couldn't fairly make an award against Metro Bank. This is because, even if it could be proven that Mr M had ill intent when accepting the payment and had scammed

Mr A, for the reasons I'll come to, this wouldn't change my mind as to the outcome of this complaint.

The account Mr A paid was opened in 2020 as a sole trader account. I've seen evidence of a valid government issued identity document provided at the time. Metro Bank say they correctly followed their account opening process and I don't think they reasonably could've foreseen that the account they were opening would later go on to receive funds as a result of an alleged scam. It follows that I don't think there were any failures in Metro Bank's opening of the account which could be said to be causal to Mr A's loss.

The activity on the account prior to the arrival of Mr A's payment was largely in line with what might reasonably be expected for a sole trader account and the nature of Mr M's business. I don't think there was anything in the account activity where I think Metro Bank should have intervened in the account and that this would have made a difference to the loss Mr A is claiming from them. The activity included international payments that appear to be towards tax authorities in other countries. And I'm also aware from linked complaints that such payments were made on behalf of Mr M's clients, albeit there are disputes as to whether appropriate amounts were paid.

Had Metro Bank intervened, they would've contacted Mr M. And, in line with the activity described above, as well as from the communication that was available between the accountholder and his clients, Mr M would've been able to explain and evidence the reasons for the payments being received (and sent on) from his account. I don't think any reasonable level of scrutiny would've resulted in Metro Bank concluding that Mr M was operating a scam. And even if they'd decided to close the account, I'm aware the Mr M had access to at least one further account with another bank. So I don't think this would've impacted the position Mr A now finds himself in, in the event of the account being closed its more likely than not that Mr M would've continued to operate through an account held elsewhere.

In relation to Mr A's payment itself, given the established pattern of usage of the account, there was nothing unusual or suspicious about the way it arrived and was spent from the account. So, I don't think this was something Metro Bank needed to intervene in.

Metro Bank say that Mr A's bank never reported the payment to them as having been made as a result of a scam. And I've not seen further evidence to support they did. I think it's most likely that the first Metro Bank knew of the potential problem with the payment was when Mr A complained to them in February 2025. I don't think it was wrong for Metro Bank to refer Mr A back to his own bank in the first instance, this is the standard industry practice. And by that point, I'm not persuaded the funds were recoverable in any case.

So whilst I'm sorry to hear that Mr A remains at a loss, because I don't think this is something Metro Bank are responsible for, there isn't a reasonable basis upon which I can require them to do more to resolve this complaint.

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 Mr A to accept or reject my decision before 13 April 2026.

Richard Annandale
Ombudsman