

The complaint

Miss C complains that Barclays Bank UK PLC (“Barclays”), have failed to refund money that she lost as part of an investment scam.

What happened

Miss C says that she came across a company that purported to be an investment firm but was actually a scammer, that I will call B.

The scam firm shared “trading signals” with Miss C and it encouraged her to invest more and more.

Miss C was persuaded to make a number of payments from her Barclays account as part of the scam. This included payments from a savings account that she held with Barclays and payments to an account she held with a different provider. The funds were then sent to a crypto exchange converted into crypto and sent to C. These payments were faster payments and totalled around £40,000. They took place between late 2024 and 2025.

Miss C realised that she had been scammed when she was continually pressured to invest more and more money.

Miss C raised a complaint with Barclays, as she believed that it should have stopped her from making the payments in question.

One of our investigators looked into this matter. They decided that Barclays did not need to intervene during the scam, given the size and pattern of the payments. He also did not think that an intervention would have stopped the scam.

Miss C did not agree with these conclusions. So her complaint has been passed to me to issue a final decision.

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.

In this decision, I’ll concentrate my comments on what I think is relevant. If I don’t comment on a specific point, it’s not because I’ve failed to consider it, but because I don’t think I need to comment in order to reach a fair and reasonable outcome. Our rules allow me to do this and this reflects the nature of our service as a free and informal alternative to the courts.

In broad terms, the starting position is that Barclays is expected to process payments and withdrawals that a customer authorises it to make, in accordance with the Payment Services Regulations and the terms and conditions of the customer’s account.

But, taking into account relevant law, regulators’ rules and guidance, relevant codes of practice and what I consider to have been good industry practice at the time, I consider it fair and reasonable that Barclays should:

- have been monitoring accounts and any payments made or received to counter various risks, including preventing fraud and scams;
- have had systems in place to look out for unusual transactions or other signs that might indicate that its customers were at risk of fraud (among other things). This is particularly so, given the increase in sophisticated fraud and scams in recent years, which firms are generally more familiar with than the average customer;
- in some circumstances, irrespective of the payment channel used, have taken additional steps, or made additional checks, or provided additional warnings, before processing a payment – (as in practice Barclays sometimes does including in relation to card payments);
- have been mindful of – among other things – common scam scenarios, how the fraudulent practices are evolving (including for example the common use of multi-stage fraud by scammers, including the use of payments to cryptocurrency accounts as a step to defraud consumers) and the different risks these can present to consumers, when deciding whether to intervene.

I do not think that Barclays actually needed to intervene early on during the scam. This is because the size of the payments were not sufficiently out of character and were not sufficiently indicative of a scam to prompt an intervention.

I think that Barclays probably should have intervened later on in the scam, when Miss C sent a payment from her savings account to the crypto exchange. This payment was for £5,000 and took place on 20 November 2024. But importantly, this does not mean that Barclays are liable for the payments made after this point. Barclays would only be liable to refund these payments if a proportional and appropriate intervention would have likely stopped the scam. Given the overall circumstances I think that an appropriate intervention would have been Barclays asking questions about the payment and to provide a warning based on the answers provided to it. So I need to consider whether this would have likely stopped the scam.

It is clear that this was a professional and sophisticated scam, not least the detail provided by the scammer in relation to technical analysis of stock and crypto prices. It is also clear that Miss C was convinced, by the time that Barclays needed to intervene, that what she was doing was legitimate. She had also built up a relationship with the scammer and she trusted him. Looking at the chats between Miss C and the scammer, she did not trust financial institutions and she was prepared to obfuscate what she was doing in order to ensure her payments were not stopped and to obtain credit. This is evidenced by her proactively splitting the payments she was making so that they would not be blocked. Miss S also sent money to the crypto exchange via different means in small amounts as well. Again, it seems to be the case that she did this to circumvent any fraud and scam blocks that may be placed on the payments and transfers. I also can see that she stated that she was going to say that she was purchasing a car in order to obtain a personal loan and I can see from Barclays' notes that she stated that she was taking out a loan to pay off existing debts.

Given the lengths Miss C was going to, to avoid Barclays's anti-fraud department from stopping any of the transactions, I think that if Barclays had asked questions about the transactions Miss C would not have been forthcoming about what she was doing. This means that I think that Barclays would have been unable to uncover the scam or provide a warning that would have sufficiently resonated with Miss C to have overcome her belief that B was a legitimate trading firm.

So overall, I think that Barclays should have intervened more than it did. But I do not think that this would have likely stopped or uncovered the scam.

I've also thought about whether Barclays did enough to attempt to recover the money Miss C lost. In this instance the funds were being sent to an account in Miss C's own name. So neither reimbursements scheme applies to the payments in question.

I appreciate this will come as a disappointment to Miss C, and I'm sorry to hear she has been the victim of a scam. However, I'm not persuaded that Barclays can fairly or reasonably be held liable for her loss in these circumstances.

My final decision

For the reasons given above, I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss C to accept or reject my decision before 18 May 2026.

Charlie Newton
Ombudsman