

## **The complaint**

A complains about delays by HSBC UK Bank Plc when processing international payments.

## **What happened**

On 2 August 2023 Mr R instructed an international payment of €110,005 to an account in Europe. The payment was processed by HSBC on 3 August 2023 and held for checks. Mr R spoke with HSBC's fraud team on 3 August 2023 and provided information about the payment he was trying to make on A's behalf. HSBC went on to process the payment and it was sent on 9 August 2023.

On 4 August 2023, a Friday, Mr R instructed another international payment. This time the payment was for €100,000 and sent to the same account. The payment was processed by HSBC on 7 August 2023 and picked up for fraud checks. Following a review by HSBC, the payment was released on 14 August 2023, the following Monday.

On 10 August 2023 Mr R instructed a payment of €100,000 that was processed by HSBC on 11 August 2023. This payment was also held for some further checks by HSBC's fraud team and released on 16 August 2023.

Mr R complained on A's behalf and HSBC issued a final response. HSBC didn't agree it had made a mistake or treated A unfairly by holding the payments. HSBC said the payments were released following completion of its checks, in line with the business account's terms and conditions.

Mr R referred A's complaint to this service and it was passed to an investigator. The investigator wasn't persuaded that HSBC had made an error or unreasonably delayed the payments whilst checks were completed. Mr R asked to appeal A's complaint and said that as far as he was aware the first payment had been released after his call with the fraud team. Mr R explained he'd spent several hours on the phone trying to resolve matters with HSBC. As Mr R asked to appeal A's complaint, it's been passed to me to make a 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.

I'm aware I've summarised the events surrounding this complaint in less detail than the parties involved. No discourtesy is intended by my approach which reflects the informal nature of this service. I want to assure all parties I've read and considered everything on file. I'm satisfied I don't need to comment on every point raised to fairly reach my decision. And if I don't comment on something, it's not because I haven't considered it. It's because I've focused on what I think are the key issues. My approach is in line with the rules we operate under.

I can see the investigator quoted the relevant section of HSBC's account terms and conditions that allows it to block or hold payments. In short, they says HSBC can take that

step if it has suspicions a payment may be fraudulent. The investigator also highlighted HSBC's obligation under industry rules that say it has to take reasonable steps to protect customers from the impact of financial crime. In light of the account terms and relevant regulations, I haven't been persuaded it was unreasonable for HSBC to stop them for further checks.

Mr R has explained that he answer questions about the payments in good time when he spoke with HSBC. And I can see each of the payments took additional time before they were approved and released. But looking at them individually, I haven't seen evidence of undue delays. The first payment was processed by HSBC on 3 August 2023 and released on 9 August 2023. The second payment was processed by HSBC on 7 August 2023 and released on 14 August 2023. The final payment was processed by HSBC on 11 August 2023 and released on 16 August 2023. Whilst I can see the payments all took time before HSBC approved them, I haven't seen evidence that shows unnecessary delays. I'm satisfied the payments were all released once HSBC had completed the relevant checks.

I appreciate Mr R feels the delays were unnecessary and don't doubt they caused him and A some inconvenience. But HSBC is obliged to protect customers from financial crime and I'm satisfied that's what it was doing when it held A's payments for further checks. So whilst I don't doubt the intervention was inconvenient for A, I haven't been persuaded HSBC made a mistake or treated acted unfairly.

I'm very sorry to disappoint Mr R but as I'm satisfied HSBC dealt with the payments fairly and had reasonable grounds to hold them for further checks I haven't been persuaded to uphold A's complaint.

### **My final decision**

My decision is that I don't uphold A's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask A to accept or reject my decision before 13 March 2024.

Marco Manente  
**Ombudsman**