

## **The complaint**

Mr M complains that Santander UK Plc blocked his account, leaving him without access to funds. He complains too about the service he received and the information he was given when he was trying to have the block lifted.

## **What happened**

Mr M has a social media account through which he sells airport lounge vouchers. In September 2023 he sold vouchers to the value of £30. The buyer claimed not to have received them and made a claim for a refund through his own bank.

When it received the claim, Santander blocked Mr M's account while it investigated what had happened.

As part of its investigation, Santander contacted Mr M to ask him about the payment he had received and to request documents showing that he was entitled to the money. Initially, Mr M was unable to upload those documents. When he did upload them, the block on the account was lifted. The block was in place for seven days in total, including over a weekend.

Mr M complained about the block on the account and about how Santander handled his queries. He said that he had been given misleading information about how long the block would remain, he had been promised return calls which had not been made, and he said that complaint points had been missed in the bank's response.

Santander acknowledged that some of the information Mr M had been given was not accurate. It offered him £50 by way of compensation. Mr M didn't accept that offer and said that he was looking for a sum in the region of £2,000. He referred the matter to this service.

One of our investigators considered what had happened. She did not think that Santander had acted unfairly in blocking Mr M's account, but agreed that its handling of his queries merited some compensation. She recommended that it pay Mr M £100. Mr M didn't accept the investigator's recommendation and asked that an ombudsman review the case.

## **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 keeping with this service's role as an informal dispute resolution service, I have not set out in detail all the contacts which Mr M had with Santander. I can assure him however that I have considered carefully what happened – which is evidenced amongst other things by call recording and transcripts.

Santander received notification from another bank which said that its customer had paid for but had not received. In the circumstances, it was reasonable of Santander to place a block on the account while it looked at what had happened.

I note that Mr M was initially unable to upload documents. It is not possible to say what caused that difficulty, but I don't believe I can necessarily assume it was because of anything the bank did wrong. But in any event, I think it unlikely that it led to any meaningful delay in Santander's investigation. I am satisfied that Santander completed its review within a reasonable time.

Mr M says that he had no access to funds while his account was blocked. I think Santander should have told him that he could – in line with usual practice – attend a branch and withdraw any salary or benefits held on the account. Be that as it may, Mr M has confirmed that he had another account, although he says he did not have access to funds. He has not explained that or provided evidence. In the circumstances, I think it more likely that, if Mr M had an account, he could have accessed funds.

I am broadly in agreement with our investigator's findings about the information which Mr M was provided with, and that he should receive some compensation for that. But it is also relevant in this case that Mr M was in correspondence with the sender of the funds and knew the overall background and reasons for Santander's actions.

In the circumstances, I agree too that £100 is fair and reasonable compensation.

### **My final decision**

My final decision is that, to resolve Mr M's complaint in full, Santander UK Plc should pay Mr M £100.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr M to accept or reject my decision before 1 August 2024.

Mike Ingram

**Ombudsman**