

## **The complaint**

Miss A complained that Santander UK Plc ('Santander') blocked a payment she wanted to make after she'd been through security.

## **What happened**

Santander stopped a payment Miss A wanted to make, after she'd already been told that it had cleared security successfully. She then spent several hours over the course of a single day (a Friday) engaged on multiple phone calls, both to and from Santander, trying to resolve the issue. She felt strongly that she should be free to spend her money as she chose and didn't feel that Santander provided her with any satisfactory reason to explain why it was blocking the payment. Matters were resolved only after Miss A went to a branch to sort out the problem when Santander re-opened after the weekend.

The experience left Miss A feeling that she had been under interrogation and led her to conclude she was being discriminated against.

When Miss A complained, Santander said it hadn't made any error and her payment had been referred for additional security checks in line with anti-fraud measures the bank had in place. Miss A didn't feel this was a satisfactory response and so she brought her complaint to us.

During the course of our investigation, Santander said that its security system had flagged the payment for additional checks after the initial block was removed, so there had been no bank error. But it accepted that Miss A's customer experience could have been better, saying that the block on payment could and should have been removed on the Friday - two days earlier than actually happened. By way of apology, Santander offered Miss A £100 compensation in recognition of the confusion and conflicting information which had resulted in Miss A going to a branch to sort out the issue.

Our investigator thought that Santander's offer was fair in all the circumstances. He agreed that the level of customer service could have been better but noted that things had been resolved within a few days. He didn't find any evidence to support Miss A's concern that she'd been discriminated against and he felt the compensation offered fairly reflected the level of inconvenience and distress she'd been caused.

Miss A disagreed with our investigator, saying that her experience during the telephone security check was particularly intense, leaving her feeling emotionally distressed. She said she was repeatedly asked the same questions by different individuals, raising concerns about the level of scrutiny she was subjected to, which felt unwarranted and left her with a sense of discrimination.

Miss A asked for an ombudsman to review her complaint, so it comes to me to 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 can understand why what's happened has been upsetting and frustrating for Miss A. But having thought about everything, I've independently reached the same overall conclusions as our investigator. I'll explain my reasons.

I've listened to the call recordings provided to me. After the payment had initially been flagged for a security check, Miss A spoke to a call handler at Santander who unblocked her account – and they both believed that the payment would then complete successfully. But whilst it's unfortunate that the payment was stopped a second time, I'm not persuaded this was the result of any bank error.

Miss A felt Santander's questioning was unduly invasive, saying '...it's not your business – it's not your money'. And I appreciate how strongly she feels about Santander pursuing answers to questions that she feels were unnecessary, especially when she'd already explained the purpose of the payment.

But Santander can't simply rely on Miss A giving assurances about the recipient and approving the proposed payment herself. I must take into account that Santander has legal and regulatory obligations that it has to act in line with. Santander is required to have processes in place to help ensure it takes reasonable steps to keep customers' money safe.

Santander's terms and conditions, which Miss A would've signed up to in order to be able to use the account, allow Santander to stop payments being made if it reasonably thinks this necessary. Here, Santander identified that further checks were needed after speaking to Miss A. This is why her account was blocked and I am satisfied that Santander acted in line with its business terms when it did this. Santander had explained that there was a real risk that Miss A might not be able to recover the money once the payment had been sent. So I think it was reasonable that Santander required information from Miss A to satisfy itself that Miss A understood the risks before authorising the payment in these circumstances.

However, Santander still needed to treat Miss A in a fair and reasonable way. Having listened carefully to Miss A's discussions with the various call handlers, I think it's fair for Santander to acknowledge that it fell short of providing a reasonable level of customer service. I think the matter could have been handled more effectively by Santander and resolved quicker – which Santander now agrees.

So as Santander has upheld this part of Miss A's complaint, I've thought about the question of fair redress.

Our approach to redress is to aim to look at what's fair and reasonable in all the circumstances of a complaint. One way we would try and do this impartially here is to put Miss A in the position she'd be in if Santander hadn't been responsible for the poor service issues it has admitted. So my starting point is to think about the impact on Miss A of what happened.

Miss A said she borrowed the money needed to make the payment, but that was her choice and I haven't been provided with anything to show that Miss A is out of pocket as a result of any poor service on the part of Santander. Fair compensation however also needs to properly reflect the wider impact on Miss A of Santander's service failings.

I'm very sorry for how what happened made Miss A feel. But I've seen nothing to suggest that Santander treated Miss A any differently to any other customer in this situation and, on balance, there's not enough evidence to uphold a complaint that Santander discriminated against Miss A.

I think the £100 payment Santander has offered by way of apology seems fair to me in all the circumstances. I haven't seen or heard enough to make me think it would be fair to require Santander to do more here. I am satisfied this amount matches the level of award I would make in these circumstances had it not already been proposed. It is in line with the amount this service would award in similar cases, and it is fair compensation for Miss A in her particular situation. I have set out below the steps I require Santander to take.

### **Putting things right**

Santander should pay Miss A £100 compensation, as it has already offered to do, to reflect the impact on her of its admitted poor service.

### **My final decision**

My final decision is that I uphold this complaint and direct Santander UK Plc to take the steps set out to put things right for Miss A.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss A to accept or reject my decision before 24 October 2024.

Susan Webb  
**Ombudsman**