

The complaint

Mr N's complained that he wasn't able to access his account with HSBC UK Bank Plc ("HSBC") using their app or website – so he couldn't make essential payments.

What happened

In early 2022, Mr N found he couldn't use HSBC's mobile banking app to complete his day to day banking. He tried uninstalling and reinstalling the app, but this didn't solve the problem. So he contacted HSBC. HSBC's agent talked him through how to get access again and told Mr N HSBC were in the process of migrating their system – but he'd not yet been migrated.

Mr N complained to HSBC. HSBC sent two responses. In the second response, they said they couldn't assure Mr N there'd be no problem in future, but their staff were working to try and stop that happening. And they said the issue may have been caused by a technical glitch.

HSBC also said they'd made a note of the feedback Mr N had given about the issues and offered him £60 compensation for the inconvenience caused.

Mr N wasn't satisfied with HSBC's response and brought his complaint to us. He remained in correspondence with HSBC, as the issues recurred. Before they sent their file to us, HSBC reviewed their handling of the complaint and noted Mr N had had to correct some of the information they included in their response. So they increased their offer of compensation to £100.

Our investigator considered Mr N's complaint and concluded HSBC had made a fair offer to resolve it. He said, that while it was clear Mr N had been inconvenienced, HSBC had resolved the matter quickly. And he could have accessed his accounts in other ways (for example, telephone banking) if the app wasn't working for him.

Mr N didn't agree with the investigator's view as he said the issues were still ongoing and he'd had to lease an iPad to access the account. He said he doesn't trust telephone banking and it isn't convenient. And he said he was concerned that he'd have to upgrade his phone to make use of the new app following migration – and regularly after that to keep up with any further updates HSBC made.

The investigator responded to Mr N, explaining that he'd considered the initial complaint because that was the one HSBC had responded to and Mr N had brought to our service. But he contacted HSBC, who consented to dealing with the ongoing issues at the same time.

Along with providing consent, HSBC told the investigator they'd provided Mr N with a Physical Secure Key (PSK) allowing him to access his account via the internet if the mobile app isn't working. But they acknowledged they'd delayed in doing that – so HSBC increased their offer of compensation to £200. And they suggested Mr N may be having issues because he uses an older phone.

Mr N disputed there was any issue with accessing the app due to the age of his phone. And he didn't accept HSBC's increased offer. So I've been asked 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.

Having done that, I'm upholding Mr N's complaint. But I'm not asking HSBC to do more than they've already offered to resolve it. I'll explain why.

I understand Mr N has been frustrated by not being able to access his account as he wishes. That's clearly inconvenient. HSBC have acknowledged that and offered him compensation for this. It's right they've done that.

It seems the problems may be linked to HSBC migrating their online banking. This sort of migration often causes issues for businesses. And, while it's unfortunate this may have happened here, I don't think it's fair for me to suggest HSBC shouldn't do this. Nor can I say that future apps shouldn't require more up to date operating systems than Mr N has on his current phone.

HSBC haven't been able to say exactly why Mr N had issues accessing his account. But I'm satisfied they looked into it. And they fixed the issue when he called – but unfortunately only temporarily. And they provided a PSK (albeit after a delay) to give Mr N another alternative means of access.

And there are alternatives, such as telephone banking, available to Mr N. I understand he doesn't want to use this. But that's his choice – as it will be his choice whether to update his phone in future. It doesn't mean he can't access his account if he needs to.

Putting things right

Having weighed up all the information, I think £200 is a reasonable amount of compensation for HSBC to pay Mr N. He was clearly inconvenienced by the fact he had to call HSBC to have the app reactivated, only for it to fail again. But he was told during the call about the migration and that it was causing issues.

So I think it's reasonable to say that, after that first contact, Mr N was aware he may have use alternatives for his banking. I'm satisfied those alternatives were available, so it's not fair to say he was without banking facilities. I don't think it's reasonable to say HSBC should pay more compensation because those facilities weren't provided in Mr N's preferred format.

Nor do I think HSBC should pay more compensation because of the potential issues Mr N said he may face. He told us he was worried about his credit score suffering if he couldn't settle bills and if he couldn't pay the fees for a relative's care. While I do understand those worries, I can only direct compensation for what has actually happened – not what might occur. I've seen no evidence that any of these problems came to pass.

So it's not appropriate for me to say HSBC should pay more compensation on this basis. I'm satisfied the compensation they've offered Mr N is adequate for the errors and delay detailed above. I don't think they need to do any more than that to resolve his complaint.

My final decision

For the reasons I've explained, I'm upholding Mr N's complaint about HSBC UK Bank Plc and directing HSBC to pay him the £200 compensation they've previously offered him.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr N to accept or reject my decision before 19 August 2022.

Helen Stacey
Ombudsman