

The complaint

Mrs B says HSBC UK Bank Plc has left her without full access to her bank account.

What happened

Mrs B failed security and so her HSBC telephone security number (TSN) was locked in 2021. For this to be reset she needed to complete and return a form, which she did. But she also needed to provide proof of identification and proof of address before HSBC could send her a new TSN pack. As she lives overseas she needed to send certified copies of the relevant documents by post. HSBC did not make this clear to Mrs B until she complained in May 2022.

HSBC received the proof it needed on 26 May 2022 and sent the TSN pack on 14 July 2022. There was a delay here as HSBC did not process her documents correctly on receipt. The last update we had was that Mrs B had still not received the TSN pack. Mrs B is therefore limited to accessing her money via her debit card. She wants full access re-instating and compensation for the time it has taken to resolve her access issue.

HSBC initially offered £100 compensation for not making clear to Mrs B that she needed to send the proof of identification and address. After our involvement it agreed to pay a further £50 to recognise that a processing error delayed the dispatch of the TSN pack to Mrs B.

Our investigator felt HSBC's revised offer was fair and reasonable. He said £150 was suitable compensation for the delays HSBC was responsible for. But he could not hold it responsible for the delays caused by the postal service. He noted it had previously taken ten weeks for post from HSBC to reach Mrs B overseas. He added that whilst Mrs B has offered to cover the cost of HSBC using DHL and the bank had opted not to do this, he could not say the bank was at fault as it had followed its standard dispatch process in such circumstances.

Mrs B disagreed with this assessment. She said the offer does not resolve the issue of her lack of online access. The TSN pack may never arrive. And she had accepted the £100 offer on the basis it would not affect any future claims against HSBC.

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 so I am satisfied that HSBC's revised offer represents a fair and reasonable settlement to Mrs B's complaint. I do accept as Mrs B's point that it does not represent a solution to her lack of access. But that is not wholly HSBC's fault, and the offer acknowledges there have been two failure points in the process where HSBC could have done things better – ie. notifying Mrs B what documentation was needed and processing the certified documents she returned more promptly.

The final failure point – the time between HSBC sending the TSN pack, which would have

allowed Mrs B full access again, and Mrs B receiving it is not something I can fairly hold HSBC liable for. Mrs B accepts the postal service she is reliant on can be erratic, with post from HSBC having taken ten weeks previously. As our investigator explained we cannot instruct a bank to change its processes – it is the job of the regulator to review processes, systems and policies. We can only check that a bank has treated a customer fairly and not made any errors. In sending the TSN pack as it would to all other overseas customers HSBC has not made a mistake or acted unfairly.

If the pack has still not arrived and needs to be re-sent I would however expect HSBC to look at all the options it has to assist Mrs B and get a replacement TSN pack to her. It should proactively contact her to agree a way forward if the issue remains unresolved.

Overall, whilst I understand the inconvenience Mrs B experienced, I have to take into account that this problem started as she failed security and HSBC has an obligation to protect its customers' funds. And Mrs B has still had access to her money via her debit card. I find that a total compensation payment of £150 recognises the inconvenience she has suffered. To clarify, Mrs B's prior acceptance of the £100 has not detrimentally impacted this finding as she seems to suggest.

Putting things right

HSBC should now pay Mrs B the additional £50. She should confirm where she wants the payment to be made to directly to HSBC.

My final decision

I am upholding Mrs B's complaint in part. HSBC UK Bank Plc must put things right as set out above.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs B to accept or reject my decision before 28 December 2022.

Rebecca Connelley
Ombudsman