

## **The complaint**

Mr and Mrs C have complained that Barclays Bank UK PLC ("Barclays") blocked them from being able to make payments on their account whilst they were on holiday.

Mr and Mrs C say that this ruined their holiday because they were unable to book any excursions whilst they were away.

## **What happened**

Barclays agreed to pay Mr and Mrs C £150 compensation due to the difficulties that Mr and Mrs C faced when trying to call Barclays to get the block removed.

One of our adjudicators assessed the complaint and they thought that what Barclays paid was reasonable.

Mr and Mrs C disagreed with the adjudicator, so the matter was referred for an ombudsman's 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 considered everything that both parties have provided, overall, I think that what Barclays offered to do to put matters right was not unreasonable. I will explain why.

### *Applying the block to the account*

Mr and Mrs C have raised objections about Barclays applying the block to their account. However, looking at the circumstances I think that Barclays' decision to apply the block was reasonable.

Mr and Mrs C say that they told Barclays that they were going abroad; they took out the travel insurance through Barclays (Travel Pack); had paid for the flights with a Barclaycard; and also deposited a lump sum into their account which was for spending money whilst away. However, despite all of that, I still don't think that Barclay's decision to apply the block was unreasonable.

I say this because the payments that triggered the block were not in US Dollars, nor were they card payments in the USA and were in fact bank transfers to a third party, that were carried out on a device with an IP address located in the USA. So, the transactions were not exactly your typical holiday expenditure that you would see when someone is using their debit card whilst on holiday. And even if Mr and Mrs C told Barclays that they were going on holiday, fraudulent transactions can still occur. So that doesn't mean that all payments made in the destination country or currency, regardless of circumstances, will all necessarily be genuine.

Barclays has not been able to elaborate on what exactly it was about the transactions that triggered the block. But I don't find that particularly unusual. I wouldn't necessarily expect it to disclose the specific reasons, because if that information became public knowledge, people could use that information to bypass its fraud detection system. Nevertheless, given the circumstances, I can certainly see why Barclays blocked the transactions in question.

And I can see why Barclays wanted to check with Mr and Mrs C that the payments were genuine, before allowing them (and further transactions) to be made from the account.

Indeed, had the payments been allowed and it turned out that they were in fact fraudulent, then no doubt Mr and Mrs C would be asking Barclays to reimburse them for their loss. So, the block was only applied as a precautionary measure to protect Mr and Mrs C's money. Therefore, whilst I recognise that it caused them inconvenience, at the same time I can't reasonably say that Barclays has actually done anything wrong by applying the block to their account.

#### *Removing the block*

I understand that once the block was applied to Mr and Mrs C's account, this caused them a great deal of difficulty. They say their holiday was ruined because they were unable to access the money they had put aside to pay for various excursions.

In the circumstances, I have a great deal of sympathy for the position that Mr and Mrs C found themselves in. And I recognise that it would've been frustrating that they could not make the transactions as and when they wanted to.

Mr and Mrs C say that they tried calling Barclays a number of times but were unable to get through. They say on one occasion, they completed security but after being on the phone for 1 hour and 10 minutes, they gave up.

Having considered what Mr and Mrs C have said, I can see they faced difficulties in trying to speak to the relevant team within Barclays. And given that they tried a number of times and were on the phone for quite some time when they did, I think that Barclays' offer of £150 reasonably reflects the frustration and inconvenience that being on the phone for so long caused them.

However, it seems that Mr and Mrs C didn't get the block removed, essentially because they gave up trying. Had Mr and Mrs C persisted and were on the phone for an excessive amount of time (beyond how long they'd already spent on the phone), then of course I could've considered potentially awarding more compensation to reflect the total amount of delay they experienced to get matters resolved. But in the end Mr and Mrs C chose not to pursue Barclays any further to resolve the matter for the duration of their trip.

As such, whilst I agree that it was unreasonable that Mr and Mrs C had to wait so long to speak to the correct department to get the block removed on their account, on the other hand there is a reasonable expectation that a consumer will try to mitigate their loss, where possible. And in this case, that unfortunately meant Mr and Mrs C being on the phone, on hold, for longer than they were, until they could speak to the relevant department.

So, taking everything into account, I think that the award that Barclays paid Mr and Mrs C reasonably reflects the frustration and inconvenience they experienced trying to rectify the situation. But I can't reasonably award further compensation for the impact on the trip caused by Mr and Mrs C's decision to give up trying to resolve the matter.

#### **Putting matters right**

I require Barclays Bank UK PLC to pay (if has not done so already) Mr and Mrs C £150 compensation to reflect the difficulties they had in trying to contact Barclays to get the block removed from their account, in full and final settlement of this complaint.

#### **My final decision**

Because of the reasons given above, Barclays Bank UK PLC needs to do what I have outlined above to resolve this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs C and Mr C to accept or reject my decision before 25 July 2023.

Thomas White  
**Ombudsman**