

## **The complaint**

Mr T complains that Barclays Bank UK PLC (“Barclays”) allowed him to use his account for gambling transactions despite there being a merchant block in place.

## **What happened**

Mr T has an account with Barclays. Mr T contacted Barclays regarding payments that had come out of his account that he wasn’t aware of. Initially he reported these transactions as fraudulent but after Barclays investigated it was established that the transactions were for a casino site Mr T used that he thought was free. The transactions were for:

- £480.39 made between 1 and 10 February 2023;
- £229.91 on 10 May 2023; and
- £233.17 made between 2 and 7 July.

Mr T was unhappy as he believed the gambling control in place on his account should’ve blocked the transactions and that he thought the games he was playing were free.

Barclays didn’t uphold Mr T’s complaint. Barclays explained that the transactions were processed using merchant category codes which were listed as being for digital, goods, media, books etc and not gambling and so there was no error on its behalf in authorising the transactions.

Mr T was unhappy with this and brought his complaint to this service.

Our investigator looked at all of this and thought that there was no evidence that Barclays had made an error as the transactions Mr T was complaining about weren’t categorised as gambling and Barclays couldn’t be held responsible for Mr T’s false belief that the gaming site he was transacting on was free.

Mr T was dissatisfied with this, he says Barclays should’ve protected him or at least notified him about the transactions and has asked 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.

It might help if I explain my role is to look at problems that a consumer has experienced and see if the business has done anything wrong or treated the consumer unfairly. If it has, we seek to put the consumer back in the position they would’ve been in if the mistakes hadn’t happened. And we may award compensation that we think is fair and reasonable.

Mr T is unhappy Barclays failed to block gambling transactions made on his account that he believed were free.

I sympathise with Mr T and the gambling struggles that he has and applaud him for seeking help. In situations such as his while I wouldn't tell Barclays what tools it needs to have in place to support customers with a gambling problem, I would expect it to utilize the tools it does have and provide support to the customer where possible.

It might help if I explain gambling blocks work by blocking transactions that match merchant codes recorded as gambling. Merchant codes are applied by the merchant and not the bank. This means that if a customer makes a transaction that doesn't have a merchant code linked to gambling, the bank wouldn't be able to block the transaction.

In Mr T's case Barclays has provided evidence to show the transactions were made by Mr T and weren't categorized as gambling by the merchant and so weren't blocked by the gambling control in place on his account. So, this being the case I can't say Barclays did anything wrong or made a mistake when Mr T was able to make these transactions.

I accept that some businesses are also able to block transactions by retailer name, but this wasn't something Barclays was able to do. In any case as I'm sure Mr T understands, nothing is fool proof, and I don't think Barclays should be penalised for the limitations in the tools it has for supporting customers with a gambling problem that are out of its control. Not being able to easily block all gambling transactions made online or otherwise because the merchant doesn't categorise them as gambling, isn't an error on Barclays's part – it simply isn't possible.

So, I don't think Barclays treated Mr T unfairly or made a mistake when it failed to block gambling transactions on his account and so I do not uphold his complaint.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons I've explained I've decided not to uphold Mr T's complaint against Barclays Bank UK PLC.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr T to accept or reject my decision before 26 March 2024.

Caroline Davies  
**Ombudsman**