



The complaint

Mr C complains that he was charged a transaction fee for taking out cash with his card when abroad when he had looked at HSBC's website which said there was no such fee. He also complained about the difficulties in lodging a complaint when abroad.

What happened

When on holiday abroad, Mr C said he checked on the internet and found there were no fees, as a premier account holder, for using his debit card to withdraw cash abroad. After withdrawing the cash he found that he had been charged £4.78, as a percentage of the amount he had withdrawn.

Mr C attempted to raise a complaint via HSBC's online chat facility. Over the course of three days he says he tried to raise a complaint several times. He was initially told that the best way of making the complaint was via the telephone, but he wanted to continue using the online chat. He subsequently tried to post the screenshot of the fee information he had found but was told that this wasn't possible, but he was able to post the link. HSBC told him this was out of date information and confirmed that the fee was correctly charged. It offered to refund the fee and to pay him £10 compensation. He rejected this and said he wanted £75 compensation.

HSBC formally responded to Mr C's complaint, advising that the fee had been correctly charged. It didn't repeat the previous offer of compensation but did refund the fee.

On referral to the Financial Ombudsman Service, our Investigator said that Mr C had been correctly charged the fee and that HSBC's offer of compensation was fair and reasonable.

Mr C said that his difficulty in making a complaint online had not been taken account of and he had previously provided details of the web page where he had seen that he shouldn't have been charged for taking the cash out when abroad.

The matter has been passed to me for an Ombudsman's consideration.

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.

Dealing firstly with the fee Mr C was charged, it does appear that the web page that he saw when checking his position over the internet was an out-of-date page. I don't quite know how he got to that page but HSBC's terms and conditions and its official website make clear that there is a fee, even for premier account customers, for taking out cash when abroad. This is a currency conversion fee and not a fee for using the card. However given that the out of date page had apparently remained on the website, I think it was appropriate to refund the fee, which HSBC has done.

As regards Mr C's difficulty in raising a complaint about the matter, I think this was difficult to

do using the online chat, particularly from abroad. But as was pointed out to Mr C initially HSBC does have customer service telephone lines to help customers with complaints. I understand that he did not want to telephone from abroad, he could have waited until he returned to the UK or unfortunately had to put up with the limitations of the online chat service. I think that HSBC having the telephone as its main facility for raising complaints is not unreasonable.

I see that when Mr C tried to raise his complaint via the online chat on 31 August, he was advised to speak to the telephone banking team, and the chat ended. He made another attempt to make a complaint on 1 September but the call terminated due to a lack of response from Mr C's end. I can see that he resumed using the online chat on 1 September. The chat appeared to close on two occasions following a delay in response from Mr C, and defaulted to a customer survey which Mr C completed saying he wanted to make a complaint. Finally he was asked to send through the link to the website he had seen. He was offered £10 compensation (with the refunded fee, the adviser said this would be a total of £15). Mr C rejected this and there was some delay whilst the adviser had to get authority to deal with his request for further compensation.

I see that HSBC gave a final response on 4 September. I appreciate the Mr C had difficulties in making his complaint via the online chat. But as I've said I think that was more due to the limitations of using the chat for making a complaint. And the chat did close several times when it detected no response from Mr C.

I've considered the compensation offered which was £10 plus the (already refunded) fee. I think that was appropriate in the circumstances of this case so I won't require HSBC to make any higher payment.

My final decision

HSBC has already made an offer to pay £10 to settle the complaint and I think this offer is fair in all the circumstances.

So my decision is that HSBC UK Bank Plc should pay Mr C £10 compensation.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr C to accept or reject my decision before 6 May 2024.

Ray Lawley
Ombudsman