

The complaint

Mrs B complains that Barclays Bank UK PLC did not process an international transfer in line with her instructions.

What happened

Mrs B says that she requested a standard Sterling transfer of £200,000 from her Barclays account to a family member's account overseas. She says Barclays found a previous transfer made to her family member and used this information to make the payment. Mrs B says at no point did she request or consent a currency conversion into Swiss Francs (CHF), and Barclays did not explain the risks, fees and exchange rate costs to her.

Mrs B says that as a result of the payment being converted, her family member received £194,384.62 from the funds transferred, which has caused significant stress and inconvenience. She says the computer screen was not easy to see or to read and she did not understand that conversion of the payment from Sterling would occur. Mrs B made a complaint to Barclays.

Barclays did not uphold Mrs B's complaint. They said the staff member Mrs B spoke to confirmed that Mrs B asked for a payment of 200,000 Sterling to be sent, and that sum was input correctly as the payment amount. They said she would have had no reason to think that the payment should be sent in anything but the currency of the destination country unless specifically told by Mrs B. They said the exchange rate being applied to the payment was given to Mrs B by the staff member as the payment was being input, which indicated that there was a currency conversion being made.

Barclays said in line with their procedures, the computer screen was presented to Mrs B for her to check the payment details and to sign and initial to agree for the payment to be submitted. They said Mrs B advised that she did carefully check the account details, but she did not see an exchange rate shown. They said the rate, as well as the Sterling amount and the Swiss Franc equivalent would have shown on the screen to be checked. Mrs B brought her complaint to our service.

Our investigator did not uphold Mrs B's complaint. She said the payment was made in agreement with Mrs B and Barclays. She understood Mrs B made a payment previously to the same beneficiary, however it's a normal process for the payment to be sent in the currency of the destination country. She said as Mrs B accepted the rate provided and agreed to go ahead with the transfer, she couldn't hold Barclays liable for the conversion loss.

Mrs B asked for an ombudsman to review her complaint. She made a number of points. In summary, she said there were regulations in place designed to protect retail investors like herself from engaging in risky foreign exchange transactions, and Barclays failed to adhere to these regulations. She said she found it extremely difficult to read the details on the screen due to her age-related vision limitations. She said the staff member did not take adequate steps to ensure that she fully understood the implications of the transaction, including potential charges and risks associated with a foreign currency transfer.

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.

Mrs B has made a number of points to this service, and I've considered and read everything she's said and sent us. But, in line with this service's role as a quick and informal body I'll be focusing on the crux of his complaint in deciding what's fair and reasonable here.

I've considered what Mrs B has said about Barclays not adhering to regulations. Mrs B has referenced herself as a retail investor, and has mentioned risky foreign exchange transactions. But Mrs B was not making an investment here, she was simply transferring money to a family member. I've considered whether Barclays have failed to adhere to regulations, but I'm not persuaded they have here, and I'll explain why.

Mrs B has been clear that the money was being transferred to a family member, and she has transferred him money previously. Mrs B has not told us that she was coerced or pressured into transferring money to this family member, so it appears she genuinely wanted to transfer £200,000 to him. She has not alleged any fraud has occurred or any scams have taken place. The central crux of her issue appears to be that the funds were sent in CHF as opposed to Sterling, despite her intentions for the payment, and this is what resulted in the family member receiving nearly £6,000 less than what was anticipated.

I've read both the testimonies from Mrs B's and the member of staff who processed the transaction for her. When it comes to complaints where it's one word against another, I have to consider the evidence available to me. I then have to weigh the evidence against the balance of probabilities, that is, what's more likely to have happened in the circumstances.

On the balance of probabilities I think it's likely that there was a misunderstanding about how the payment would be made. While Mrs B is likely to have said that she wanted to send £200,000, as it's being sent to an overseas country, it wouldn't be unusual for the payment to have been sent in the currency of the destination country, especially as Mrs B appears to have told the branch staff the country where the account was held overseas. So while £200,000 would leave Mrs B's account, this would be converted to CHF – unless Mrs B stated the money was to be received in Sterling.

I'm persuaded that Mrs B was treated fairly as the full information of the payment was presented to her on the screen, and she had the opportunity to confirm whether the details were in line with her instructions. While I've taken into account what Mrs B has said about her vision and her age, if there was anything she couldn't see or understand on the screen, it would have been proportionate for her to query this with the staff member, or to ask for the text to be larger by zooming in, especially given the size of the transaction.

It also appears that the member of staff who processed the transaction had a conversation with Mrs B about the exchange rate and £1 nearly being the equivalent to 1CHF. I'm not persuaded that it would have been proportionate for the staff member to mention the exchange rate if she believed the payment was to be sent and received in Sterling.

Barclays have confirmed the conversion rate was also displayed on the screen, and that a customer must read and sign the payment details are correct and she therefore would have been presented with clear information regarding the foreign exchange transaction, so I can't fairly say that Mrs B shouldn't have been aware that the funds would be converted.

As Barclays would have no information about the family member's account, then they would be unaware that the recipient bank would also convert the funds (it appears at a different

exchange rate due to the exchange rate loss). So I can't hold Barclays responsible for a third party bank also converting the funds, or the exchange rate that the third party bank used - which has resulted in the loss, as this would be outside of Barclays control.

The staff member confirmed that Mrs B and herself did have a conversation about the fees involved and they shared a joke about who would pay them. So I'm persuaded Mrs B was fully informed of any fees involved in making the payment.

Ultimately, Mrs B was presented with the payment instruction on the screen, and she authorised the payment to be converted to CHF, whether this was her intention or not. So Barclays acted in line with the payment details on the screen as Mrs B had signed to say these details were correct. And therefore, they had a duty to process the payment in line with her signed instructions, which is what they did. So it follows I don't require Barclays to do anything further.

My final decision

I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs B to accept or reject my decision before 29 May 2024.

Gregory Sloanes
Ombudsman