

The complaint

Mr R complains that a refund made by American Express Services Europe Limited (AESEL) wasn't visible to him in the app because it appeared against the date of the original transaction rather than the date it was processed.

What happened

Mr R holds a Platinum Cashback credit card with AESEL. He used the card to purchase train tickets. Due to a rail strike Mr R applied for a refund of £195 from the rail operator.

Mr R couldn't see the refund on his credit card app. He chased the refund up with the rail operator, who said it had issued the refund. When Mr R's monthly statement became available, he discovered that the refund had been processed, but because it appeared against the date of the original transaction rather than the date it was processed, he hadn't been able to see it in the app.

Mr R complained to AESEL. He was unhappy that the app didn't show refunds on the date they were processed. He said that if the refund had been shown on the date it was processed, this would've been clearer and would've saved him time and effort chasing the rail operator.

AESEL didn't uphold the complaint. It said it had investigated and had established that this was a system limitation which AESEL had determined was satisfactory. AESEL said it appreciated that the formatting of the app and the displaying of specific transactions was not to every customer's preference, it was in line with AESEL's policies and processes.

Mr R remained unhappy and brought his complaint to this service. He said he'd had refunds previously which had shown up correctly in the chronological list of transactions in the app. He said the app was the most convenient way to view transactions prior to the monthly statement becoming available and he felt that AESEL was knowingly presenting information in a way which was unclear and misleading for customers. Mr R said that as a resolution to his complaint he wanted AESEL to address this known anomaly in the app.

Our investigator didn't uphold the complaint. He said the reason why the refund appeared against the original purchase date (as opposed to the date when the refund was processed) was because the rail operator had presented and processed the refund using that date. The investigator said he appreciated that AESEL had told Mr R that this was a system limitation and said AESEL should've provided a clearer explanation of what it meant by this, which was that the limitation related to AESEL not being able to change the date of how the rail operator presented and processed the refund. The investigator said he couldn't hold AESEL responsible for the way in which the merchant had processed the refund.

Mr R didn't agree so I've been asked to review the complaint.

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.

I understand how strongly Mr R feels about this matter and I appreciate that he has spent considerable time and effort initially chasing the rail operator for the refund and subsequently, corresponding with AESEL and then this service about the way the refund appeared in the app. Mr R has been very clear about what he considers to be a known issue with AESEL's systems. He has also been clear that he doesn't seek compensation, and that his preferred resolution would be for AESEL to display account information accurately.

There's no dispute that the refund from the rail operator appeared in the app on the date of the original purchase (13 December 2023) even though the refund was processed at a later date (5 February 2024).

I've thought about whether AESEL made an error in the way it displayed the refund.

AESEL has explained that the merchant (the rail operator) posted the refund transaction as 13 December 2023. It has said that this information was passed to the front-end channels (the app) and that because of system limitations which mean it isn't possible to change the date of how the merchant presents the refund, no modifications are possible in terms of the date the refund is displayed.

I appreciate that this explanation goes beyond the explanation provided in AESEL's final response to Mr R's complaint. It's unfortunate that AESEL didn't provide more information in its final response. That said, the information provided in the final response isn't wholly inconsistent with the information which has been provided now. But the limited information in the final response did cause Mr R to think that there was an issue with AESEL's systems which they weren't prepared to address.

To the extent that AESEL's system (specifically the app) shows a refund on the date that the merchant posts the refund transaction, and to the extent that this date can't be changed by AESEL, I agree that there is a limitation within the system. But I don't agree that AESEL has deliberately set out to present the refund in a misleading way, or that it has made an error in the way the information is presented.

I appreciate that Mr R won't agree. He's said that AESEL can present the data in any way that a system is designed to display it and that there is no technical reason why this can't happen.

I'm not a technical expert and I don't have specific knowledge of AESEL's systems. AESEL has stated that it can't change the date of when the merchant presents the refund. This service isn't able to tell a business to change its systems or processes. Nor can this service compel AESEL to display information on the app in a different way.

Ultimately, I need to decide whether AESEL has made an error here or treated Mr R unfairly. I'm not persuaded that AESEL has made an error. As I've already said, I think AESEL could've provided a more detailed explanation of the system limitation in its final response. But I don't think this means that AESEL has treated Mr R unfairly.

I appreciate that this isn't the outcome that Mr R is hoping for. However, as I've said above, I'm satisfied that AESEL has provided a sufficient explanation for what caused Mr R's refund to be displayed in the way it was.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold the complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask X to accept or reject my decision before 19 August 2024.

Emma Davy
Ombudsman