

## **The complaint**

Ms A complains that she has been unable to make online banking payments from her account with The Royal Bank of Scotland Plc (RBS) and that RBS has failed to provide proper support to her.

## **What happened**

Ms A lives abroad. She needed a card reader to make online payments from her RBS bank account. She complained to RBS and to this Service about delays in it sending the card reader to her. That complaint was resolved and RBS paid her compensation for the delay. I mention this only by way of background.

In 2023 Ms A tried to transfer money from her bank account to her account overseas via a foreign exchange service I'll call W. The transaction failed.

Ms A's complaint concerns the way RBS responded to her requests for assistance in using online banking to make the required payments. She tried to resolve the problem both in person and on the telephone and was frustrated that RBS couldn't assist her.

Ms A visited an RBS branch in person (having been unable to make an appointment). She said RBS could not resolve the underlying problem. RBS agreed to transfer money to Ms A's overseas bank account at the exchange rate she would have received had she used W to convert the payment to the overseas currency.

RBS logged Ms A's central complaint about her inability to make online payments, including the small bill payments she tried to make as test payments. It also logged her additional complaints, such as the difficulties she experienced trying to make an appointment at the RBS branch. Ms A said RBS's logging of the additional complaints was unhelpful and confusing as they were peripheral to her central complaint.

Ms A sent RBS screenshots of the various stages of the online banking payment process, to illustrate the problem. She said the repeated failed payments would impact the exchange rates she could obtain from W. She asked to speak with RBS's IT department, but the bank said that wasn't possible as the department was not customer facing. Ms A escalated her complaint with RBS's Executive office, which acknowledged her complaint and told her that sufficient time had elapsed for her to come to this Service.

Ms A asked us to look into her complaint. Our Investigator asked RBS why the online payments were failing and for a response based on the screenshots that Ms A had sent to it showing each stage of the process.

RBS' internal technical support team made some suggestions for why the transactions might have failed. This included the possibility of Ms A not using the correct debit card in its card reader or completing all the required stages. Ms A didn't agree that she had failed to follow the correct steps and pointed out that she was using the only card that RBS had issued to her.

RBS also told us that Ms A had been able to make payments to W since raising her complaint with this Service. Our Investigator asked her about this. Ms A confirmed that she had made successful payments, but she was concerned that the underlying issue remained. She was also worried about what might happen when she needed to send a substantial payment overseas following the sale of her UK property.

At our Investigator's request, RBS said it would call Ms A to talk her through the online payment process. But Ms A explained that the call didn't move things forward for her, because the person calling did not have all the information they needed about the background to this issue or the authority to resolve it. RBS suggested that Ms A use CHAPS for the future large payment, given the limits on the amount she can transfer using online banking.

Our Investigator ultimately upheld the complaint in part. She wasn't persuaded that Ms A's payments had failed due to an RBS error. But she thought RBS had not properly engaged with Ms A about the payment problem and she said that its level of support had been poor. She recommended that RBS pay Ms A £250 compensation for her distress and inconvenience, which it agreed to do. Our Investigator thought this was a reasonable settlement, given Ms A had since been able to make successful online payments to W.

Ms A didn't accept RBS's offer, because she said the central issue had not been resolved. She remained concerned that the payment problems would continue. Although Ms A had not been seeking compensation, she said £250 did not properly reflect the distress and inconvenience she had suffered. So the complaint has come to me to decide.

### **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.

My decision is confined to Ms A's complaint about the difficulties she has experienced in making online payments from her RBS account. For the sake of certainty, I am not deciding Ms A's earlier complaint about the delivery of the card reader, which was resolved.

Ms A has explained her complaint clearly in her detailed correspondence both with RBS and this Service. I have summarised her complaint, but I want to reassure her that I have read and carefully considered all the points she has made.

Like our Investigator I partly uphold Ms A's complaint. I think the offer RBS has now made to pay her £250 compensation represents a fair and reasonable outcome to this complaint. I will explain my reasons. In doing so, I have focused on what I consider to be the key issues.

It must have been frustrating for Ms A that she could not make online payments from her RBS account via third party platforms, including W. Like our Investigator, I think RBS should have done more to assist Ms A with this. RBS did not have to connect her to its internal IT team. But it could reasonably have gathered more information from her at an earlier stage to better understand the problem and to support her.

Ms A could not make an appointment with RBS's branch to discuss the issues as she wanted to. RBS said that it does not arrange advance appointments and that it explains this on its website. But I am pleased to note that during Ms A's visit, the branch staff member agreed to transfer money to Ms A's overseas bank account at the exchange rate she would have obtained had she been able to use W for the transaction. This seems to me to have been a reasonable and pragmatic response, even though I understand Ms A's annoyance

that the underlying issue was not resolved during her visit.

I acknowledge Ms A's concern that RBS responded to the linked issues, such as being unable to arrange an appointment without dealing with the central issue. I think RBS properly logged her various concerns and, having done so I think it did need to respond to her. But Ms A made it clear to RBS that she was looking for support with the central issue. As I've said, I think RBS could have done more to help Ms A at an earlier stage.

When RBS's internal technical team did review Ms A's screen shots of the failed transaction, it made suggestions for why the payment might have failed. I understand Ms A didn't agree that those suggestions were causing the problem for the reasons she explained to us. Ultimately, I don't think I can now determine what caused the problem. But I understand Ms A has now made successful payments to W. I've read Ms A's comments that she took a risk in making the successful payments to W (because of the concern that another failed payment would affect the exchange rate available to her). But given the successful payments I can't reasonably find that the issue is ongoing.

Ms A is worried about what might happen in the future, especially when she needs to make a large payment. RBS has suggested that she make a payment using CHAPS, which is the method typically used for large transactions. I think this was a reasonable suggestion. I am pleased to hear that following Ms A's recent visit, a member of staff at RBS' branch has personally offered to assist Ms A when she needs to make the large transfer.

But ultimately I can deal only with events that have happened. I can't obtain assurances from RBS or make decisions about events which might happen in the future. While I know this is unwelcome, Ms A would need to raise a fresh complaint with RBS should she experience similar problems again and, if unresolved with this Service.

In summary, I think RBS took some steps to assist Ms A, but it should reasonably have tried to understand the problem and request additional information from her earlier than it did. This would have saved Ms A some of the time and effort she has spent on this issue.

I understand Ms A considers £250 compensation is insufficient. But having taken into account RBS's overall response I think it is a fair and reasonable amount of compensation for the distress and inconvenience RBS caused Ms A by the shortcomings in its service.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons I've explained, my final decision is that I uphold this complaint in part. I require The Royal Bank of Scotland Plc to pay Ms A £250 compensation for her distress and inconvenience, as it has now offered to do.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms A to accept or reject my decision before 28 August 2024.

Amanda Maycock  
**Ombudsman**