

## **The complaint**

Mr H complains about the service he received from HSBC UK Bank Plc when trying to open a secondary current account.

## **What happened**

Mr H holds a current account with HSBC. In February 2024, he applied online for a secondary current account. Mr H contacted HSBC after he didn't hear anything about the application. HSBC told him that as an existing customer, he could not open a secondary account online and instead, would need to visit a branch. And there would be a delay of four weeks for an appointment in the branch local to him.

In the meantime, Mr H received notification that his online application had been declined. He said this showed that it was possible to open a new account online. Mr H was unhappy that he received conflicting messages about his account and said these were repeated with an account application he made on behalf of his son. Mr H was also unhappy about the way that HSBC handled his complaint.

HSBC didn't uphold Mr H's complaint. It said that he applied for the account as a new customer. Once HSBC saw that Mr H already held an account, it attached the online application to his existing customer profile and declined the application. HSBC thought it correctly told Mr H that it could not process his application online and that he would have to visit a branch.

Our investigator didn't uphold Mr H's complaint. They explained that existing customers can't open a new account online. Our investigator said that when Mr H clicked to apply for another account within the mobile banking app, he was directed to HSBC's external website. And from here, Mr H applied for an account as a new customer. This was why the application was later declined.

Our investigator thought that HSBC dealt with Mr H fairly over the phone and explained the process for opening a new account as an existing customer.

Our investigator noted that Mr H was confused when he received notification that his application had been declined after HSBC told him it could not locate the application. Our investigator explained that when HSBC receives an application, it checks to see whether it already holds details for the customer. HSBC then looks to merge the new profile from the application with the existing details it holds. Once HSBC did this, it could see Mr H was an existing customer so declined the application he made online. Our investigator said that due to needing to link Mr H's details, HSBC may not have seen the application that he had made online at the time he called.

Mr H disagrees with the investigation outcome. He says HSBC repeatedly gave him the wrong information and contradicted itself during calls. '

## **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 realise that I have summarised this complaint in less detail than the parties and I have done so using my own words. The informal nature of our service, together with the rules that govern us, allow me to take this approach. But this does not mean I have not considered everything the parties have provided.

I have only dealt with Mr H's complaint as far as it relates to the opening of the secondary bank account. His concerns about a disputed transaction, the way his complaint was handled and the opening of his son's account, have been dealt with separately.

I am sorry to hear about the frustration that Mr H has felt dealing with HSBC but overall, I am not persuaded that it made a mistake for which it should be required to pay compensation.

HSBC's records show that Mr H applied for the current account on 19 February 2024. Although he says he applied for the account through online banking, the activity report supplied by HSBC shows that Mr H was only logged onto mobile banking on that day. This makes it unlikely that Mr H was able to apply for the account while logged on to online banking.

Instead, the most likely explanation is that while using his mobile banking app, Mr H clicked on a link which took him to HSBC's external website. From there, Mr H applied for the account as someone new to HSBC. The link to apply for an account as someone new to HSBC sits next to the section headed 'Already an HSBC customer?' This section explains that if someone is already an HSBC customer, they need to apply for their account in branch. Although Mr H may not recall seeing this information on HSBC's website, I am satisfied that it was there. And the only way he could have applied for the account online was to use the link under the heading 'New to HSBC?.' So, I don't find that HSBC made a mistake which then allowed Mr H to apply for a new account as an existing customer of HSBC.

I appreciate that Mr H feels HSBC gave him conflicting information, but I don't think this was the case from listening to the calls he had on 22 February 2024. I can hear Mr H explaining that he is an existing customer and had made an online application to open a secondary bank account four days ago but had not received a response. The advisor places him on hold to get some help from another team member. She says she cannot see details of Mr H's application so transfers the call to the non-digital team.

Mr H then speaks to the non-digital team and explains that he wants to open another current account so he can move money from his existing account to a second current account. The advisor says that they will take a few details but cannot open the account by phone – this would need to be done in branch. The advisor can see that the next available appointment at Mr H's local branch is in a month's time. Although she does say that Mr H could walk into branch but may have to wait for someone to become available.

I can understand Mr H's frustration with the secondary account opening process given that so much banking is now dealt with online. But I can't fairly interfere with the process that HSBC chooses to use for existing customers. I'm satisfied that HSBC explained to Mr H that he could not open the secondary account over the phone or online. Although Mr H says he was able to open a secondary account online – for the reasons outlined above, this was only because he did so as a new customer rather than an existing customer. So, I don't find that HSBC gave him contradictory information about the account opening process.

Mr H was unhappy that he had not heard anything back about his online application. However, HSBC's records show that when he applied online, its' systems flagged a possible customer match. This is likely to have caused a delay notifying Mr H and this seems reasonable. By the time that Mr H complained to HSBC on 22 February 2024, it had only been a few days since he made the application. So, I am not persuaded there was an unreasonable delay on the part of HSBC.

For the reasons outlined above, I don't consider HSBC treated Mr H unfairly or made a mistake, so I don't uphold this complaint.

### **My final decision**

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

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr H to accept or reject my decision before 20 August 2024.

Gemma Bowen  
**Ombudsman**