

## **The complaint**

Mr B and Mrs B are unhappy the HSBC UK Bank Plc declined transactions they tried to make on their joint account while overseas.

## **What happened**

Mr B and Mrs B were overseas and tried to make a series of purchases using their debit cards for their joint current account. But the attempted payments declined. Mr B and Mrs B weren't happy about this, so they raised a complaint.

HSBC responded to Mr B and Mrs B but didn't feel they'd done anything wrong regarding the payments. Mr B and Mrs B disagreed, so they referred their complaint to this service.

One of our investigators looked at this complaint. But they felt that HSBC had been able to demonstrate that all the payments had been declined for legitimate reasons. Mr B and Mrs B remained dissatisfied, so the matter was escalated to an ombudsman for a final decision.

## **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.

This includes reviewing the transactional information for both Mr B's debit card and Mrs B's debit card for the time that they were overseas. And, having done so, I'm satisfied that on all occasions where an attempted payment was declined, there was a valid reason for that payment to be declined.

For instance, on 11 August 2024, Mr B attempted an online purchase of £133.77. This purchase appears to have been blocked by HSBC's automated fraud prevention systems, which given that it was taking place from overseas, doesn't feel unreasonable to me.

The following day, 12 August, Mrs B tried to make a contactless purchase of £137.64. But this payment was declined because HSBC required Mrs B to make a purchase using her PIN before she could make any more contactless payments.

Mrs B may have received a notification from HSBC advising her of this, although given as she was overseas this notification may not have been received by her. However, I note that Mrs B was able to make a purchase for £145.00 from a different merchant with her debit card using her PIN the next day, 13 August.

Also on 13 August, Mr B made two successful purchases using his debit card, for £205.76 and £78.78. Then, on 15 August, Mr B tried to make a purchase for £1,092.97 to a jeweller. This purchase declined because the PIN function was bypassed, which most likely means that the payment was attempted to be verified with a signature rather than inputting the PIN.

However, less than two minutes later, Mr B attempted the payment again, this time using his PIN, and the purchase was successful. And later that day, Mr B made a successful purchase of £33.76 in a public house, again using his PIN.

A few hours later, Mr B tried to make another purchase at the same public house, this time for £60.52. But this payment declined for the same reason the payment at the jeweller had initially declined, because the PIN function was bypassed. But like what happened at the jeweller, Mr B immediately tried to make the payment again, this time using his PIN, and the payment was successful.

Finally, on 18 August, Mr B made three unsuccessful attempts to make a purchase of £73.98 from an events company. But on each occasion, the payment was attempted without using the PIN function, like how the initial purchases to the jeweller and public house had been attempted. And each payment attempt was declined for that reason.

In consideration of all the above, I don't feel that HSBC have acted unfairly towards Mr B and Mrs B regarding the declined payments as Mr B and Mrs B feel was the case. This is because Mr B and Mrs B were able to make several payments using their debit cards. And on the occasions that Mr B and Mrs B's attempted payments were declined by HSBC, I'm satisfied that there were valid reasons for these declines, as explained above.

Mr B and Mrs B may note that it's common in the overseas territory that they were visiting for payments to be authorised without the use of a PIN. But HSBC's account security protocols require the use of a PIN whenever it's possible to do so. And on each occasion where a payment was declined because a PIN wasn't used, the transactional information that HSBC received stated that it was possible to complete the purchase using a PIN, but that the PIN function had been bypassed.

All of which means that I won't be upholding this complaint against HSBC or instructing them to take any further or alternative action here. I realise this may not be the outcome Mr B and Mrs B were wanting, but I hope that they understand, given what I've explained, why I've made the final decision that I have.

### **My final decision**

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B and Mrs B to accept or reject my decision before 28 February 2025.

Paul Cooper  
**Ombudsman**