

## **The complaint**

Mr H complains that Barclays Bank UK PLC ('Barclays') should not have contacted him about fraudulent activity on a cancelled debit card while he was on holiday.

## **What happened**

Mr H had a current account with Barclays. In September 2024 two attempts were made on consecutive days, by a person unknown, to use a cancelled debit card of Mr H's. This triggered Barclays' fraud detection system. So Barclays made a number of attempts both by phone and text message to contact Mr H to discuss the activity. Mr H was abroad on holiday at the time and spoke to Barclays on three occasions. The debit card activity was identified as fraudulent.

Mr H complained in October 2024 about receiving multiple messages from Barclays' fraud team. He felt his holiday abroad was disrupted and the matter caused him a great deal of stress. Mr H also complained that when he phoned Barclays, he was assured by each adviser he spoke to that Barclays would not need to contact him again. Mr H asked for £500 compensation for the stress caused to him.

Barclays responded and outlined the two transactions that triggered its fraud detection system. It said when the system was triggered, it had to follow its fraud prevention process which included sending text messages and calling Mr H to find out if the payment was genuine.

It also said it reviewed three calls made to it on two consecutive days and couldn't hear that Mr H was told he would not be contacted about any further transactions on his old debit card. Although Barclays said it did not uphold Mr H's complaint, it offered a goodwill gesture of £50.

Mr H remained unhappy and so brought his complaint to this Service. He said the debit card being used was old and had been replaced and so Barclays should have known that any attempt to use it must have been fraudulent. Mr H said the Barclays' advisers told him there was no need to contact him at all. He said the repeated contact from Barclays made him feel incredibly stressed.

Our Investigator didn't uphold Mr H's complaint. He said Barclays followed the correct procedure when it contacted him about the fraudulent transactions and he would expect Barclays to contact consumers in situations like this one, as it had an obligation to protect customer funds. He said there was no guarantee that the payment on the old card was fraudulent.

Mr H was unhappy with what our Investigator said, so this came to me for a decision.

I contacted both parties and let them know that I intended to come to a different conclusion to that of our Investigator. I said I intended to say the second phone call made by Mr H was unnecessary, as he was asked to call Barclays as a result of it failing to remove a marker from its system following the first call. I told both parties that the £50 already offered to Mr H

was a fair amount to compensate for the distress and inconvenience of getting additional communications from Barclays and having to make the second call. I gave both parties the opportunity to respond.

Barclays responded and said it agreed with the points made.

Mr H responded and said he had gone on holiday to avoid stress but this, including the threat of being abroad without access to funds, had caused three days of anxiety. Mr H said it took time to resolve the matter.

I am now in a position to issue my 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.

I want to first of all say that it's important to note that Barclays, as a regulated business, are obliged to deal quickly and thoroughly with any concerns it has about fraudulent activity. This is for the protection of both Barclays and its customers. The fact is that this Service will rarely interfere with reasonable security measures taken by businesses.

Barclays has told us that it has an automated fraud detection system and when a transaction is flagged, the system contacts consumers by text message or automated phone call, or both. This is what happened to Mr H. A person unknown attempted to use an old debit card and Barclays' system correctly flagged this as concerning activity. So, from what I can see, Barclays has followed its own process correctly.

I understand that Mr H thinks that as the card was old, Barclays should have known any activity was fraudulent activity and so it shouldn't have needed to contact him. But the fraud detection system is an automated one and it seems reasonable that activity on a card that had been replaced some time ago would flag as concerning. Once flagged, I think it was reasonable for Barclays to check with the owner of the old card, Mr H, whether he had used the card. In this way it has confirmed, rather than assumed, that the activity was fraudulent.

When he first brought his complaint to us, Mr H was concerned that staff had incorrectly reassured him during the various phone conversations that he would not be contacted again. Having listened to the calls, I could hear that staff were quickly able to let Mr H know that someone was trying to use his old card and to provide details of the attempted fraud. Mr H was, understandably, very concerned that his current debit card might be blocked and he would be left without access to money. But assurances were provided that his current debit card wouldn't be affected by the fraudulent activity. And in one of the calls, it was explained to Mr H that the messages he received were generated automatically. So I can't see that Mr H was told he wouldn't be contacted again.

Mr H made three phone calls to Barclays. I'm satisfied it was necessary for Barclays to contact Mr H, and ask him to call it, when it twice suspected fraudulent activity on the old card. But I do think the second phone call that Mr H needed to make to Barclays was unnecessary and happened as a result of an error on the part of Barclays.

I say this because when Mr H contacted Barclays the first time, it was because someone had attempted to use his old card, and he was told the matter with that particular transaction was fully dealt with. But he continued to get messages from Barclays asking him to contact it, so the second call was made by him. During this call the adviser spoke to the fraud team

and it seems that there was a marker of some sort that hadn't been removed after the first call, when it should have been. So the adviser removed it during that call.

So while Mr H did need to make the first and third calls, as each was attached to an attempted fraudulent transaction, the second call was made following an error by Barclays in sorting out the first attempted fraud and so didn't need to be made. If Barclays had dealt with matters correctly after the first call, then Mr H wouldn't have needed to make the second call.

I can see that Barclays has already offered Mr H £50 compensation as a gesture of goodwill. So I've considered whether this is a fair amount of compensation for the unnecessary distress and inconvenience around the second call. And I'm satisfied the £50 already offered is a fair amount.

I know that Mr H has asked for the stress and anxiety caused by having to communicate with Barclays over a number of days to be taken into consideration. And for the stress caused by his concerns about being left without a debit card, and so access to money, while on holiday.

But although it's clear that this entire matter caused Mr H a great deal of stress – and I sympathise with Mr H that the attempted frauds, and the subsequent follow up by Barclays, happened at a time when he was having a long awaited holiday and was experiencing other pressures in his life – the fact is Barclays didn't make any errors when it flagged the fraudulent activity, contacted Mr H and he made the first and third calls to it. So it wouldn't be fair – and I have to be fair to both parties – to tell Barclays to compensate him for that.

So the events that Mr H is being compensated for are the unnecessary communications sent to him following his first call to Barclays, and that he had to make an unnecessary second call. And, as I said, I'm satisfied the award of £50 already made by Barclays is a fair amount to compensate Mr H for the stress of having to call Barclays a second time to deal with a matter that should have been sorted out during the first call.

I know Mr H will be disappointed that I am only partially upholding his complaint but while I sympathise that this matter has caused him a great deal of stress, I can only ask Barclays to compensate for distress and inconvenience caused by errors made by it.

### **My final decision**

It's my final decision that Barclays Bank UK PLC should pay Mr H the £50 compensation already offered to him, if this has not already been paid.

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

Martina Ryan  
**Ombudsman**