

The complaint

Ms C complains that The Royal Bank of Scotland Plc (RBS) blocked her card which prevented her from paying for an experience while she was on holiday.

She'd like compensation for the loss of opportunity and inconvenience caused.

What happened

Ms C has a current account with RBS, and she intended to use her debit card while she was on holiday in September 2024.

Whilst away she attempted to make a payment, but the payment didn't go through. Ms C didn't receive an SMS alert, or any indication that there was something wrong with the payment. So, she called RBS to see if they could help.

She made the call around 7am UK time but was told that the fraud department didn't open until 8am and that's who she'd need to speak with.

Around 2pm in the afternoon, Ms C called RBS fraud department and was able to have the block lifted, so she could continue to use her debit card.

However, she was unhappy because the block that had been put on her account, prevented her from paying for a safari trip with her family that she was due to go on the same day. She complained to RBS.

RBS investigated what happened. They said they expect their consumers to let them know if they're travelling abroad and are intending to use their debit card as this can minimise the risk of transactions being blocked or flagged as suspicious (although they still ensure accounts are monitored for fraud purposes). Because Ms C didn't do this and she then attempted to make a transaction in a different country, it flagged as suspicious, and a temporary block was put in place. Usually, a SMS is sent to the consumer so they can confirm the payment is being made by them – but RBS have accepted that they have no evidence of the SMS being sent. Because of this, they agreed to pay £100 to Ms C and to re-imburse her for any telephone costs, which was £58.88.

Ms C remained unhappy and brought her complaint to this service. One of our investigators considered the matter, but they thought the offer that RBS made to Ms C was fair and reasonable.

Ms C disagreed. She said RBS should provide 24-hour support to their customers and she didn't think RBS or the investigator had taken account of her disabilities. She also said she'd lost the deposit for the safari trip – but was unable to provide evidence of this. She asked for the case to be decided by an ombudsman, so it has been passed to me to consider.

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.

Banks have automated fraud detections systems that are triggered by the latest fraud intelligence. If they have concerns about a transaction or it is flagged on their system, they will usually temporarily block the account. This is to protect their customers and to prevent any further fraudulent transactions. In this instance RBS' fraud detection system flagged Ms C's payment on 21 September 2024.

I've reviewed the terms and conditions of Ms C's account, and I'm satisfied that RBS were entitled to temporarily block this transaction and Ms C's account for security purposes. I'm also satisfied that this wasn't done to inconvenience Ms C, but rather to protect her.

Usually, when a temporary block is applied to the account, RBS said they send an SMS to their customers so they can either contact them to discuss the payment, or confirm that they are trying to make the payment.

RBS hasn't been able to provide evidence that the SMS was sent to Ms C at the time she attempted the transaction. Ms C also says she didn't receive it. So, I think it's most likely that Ms C didn't receive the alert from RBS.

However, I am aware that Ms C used her initiative and tried to call RBS to get the problem sorted – but unfortunately the fraud department wasn't available for another hour or so.

Ms C waited a further 7 hours before she called RBS fraud department and she was able to have the temporary block lifted. This was at around 2pm UK time. This meant Ms C's account was blocked during that time.

RBS has recognised that not sending the SMS will have caused some inconvenience to Ms C and have paid her £100. They've also reimbursed £58.88 for the telephone call costs Ms C incurred while trying to sort the problem. Ms C says she missed out on going on a family safari trip, lost her deposit and the block on her account caused her significant inconvenience.

So, all that's left for me to decide is whether I think RBS should pay more compensation to Ms C, and whether they should re-imburse her the deposit she paid for the family trip.

Having thought about this, I think what RBS has agreed to pay is fair in the circumstances.

Ms C has said she isn't able to provide evidence of the deposit she paid for the safari trip because she withdrew cash. However, I would've expected Ms C to have been provided with some sort of receipt or paperwork confirming she was attending the safari trip on the day she had trouble with her account. Without this, it's very difficult for me to require RBS to reimburse the money she lost.

Secondly, I'm satisfied that RBS was entitled to temporarily block Ms C's account. So, I do not think it needs to pay any further compensation for this. RBS has acknowledged that they didn't send an SMS to Ms C, but I don't think this would've changed the sequence of events. I think it's likely Ms C would've still needed to speak to RBS fraud department to confirm she was making the transaction, and she would've had to wait to do this until the fraud department opened.

RBS has explained that they operate a 24-hour service to their customers, but as a UK bank not all specialist departments are available during that time. They do have an emergency service, but this is for extreme cases, and they didn't consider Ms C's circumstances or disability sufficient to speak with the emergency department.

I understand Ms C feels differently, but I think RBS acted reasonably when they said Ms C would need to wait to speak with the fraud department, as they were most appropriate. That's not to say I have dis-regarded Ms C's disability – but taking everything into account, I don't think she required emergency support during that time.

So, whilst I have no doubt this was a frustrating and inconvenient situation for Ms C. I think the payment of £100 for the inconvenience of not sending the SMS is reasonable. And I think the gesture of goodwill to pay Ms C's telephone call costs (approximately £58.88) is also fair in the circumstances. I do not think RBS needs to do anything further.

My final decision

For the reasons I've explained above, I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms C to accept or reject my decision before 10 September 2025.

Rachel Killian
Ombudsman