

The complaint

Mr M says that HSBC UK Bank Plc, trading as first direct, made it difficult for him to make a payment towards his credit card balance.

What happened

Mr M had planned to clear the balance on his first direct credit card when the promotional interest rate ended in October 2024.

In September 2024 he was on a business trip abroad and tried to make a payment but couldn't make one through the app, couldn't locate an international contact telephone number and there was no webchat facility to contact first direct on either. He tried to transfer money to ensure that at least the minimum payment could be taken from the account he made direct debit payments towards his credit card account from; but that transfer was blocked for security reasons.

First direct tried to take the minimum payment on 14 October 2024 but it failed as insufficient funds were available.

Mr M subsequently complained to first direct. He said they'd made it difficult for him to make a payment. He cleared the balance on the account but was upset when he was later told his credit limit had been reduced. He was also concerned that another credit card provider increased their interest rate, and one cancelled an increase on 'updated information'. He thought this was likely the result of adverse information first direct would have reported to his credit file.

First direct didn't think they'd done anything wrong and when Mr M referred his complaint to this service, neither did our investigator. She thought the international contact number was clearly visible on first direct's website and that they were entitled to reduce the credit they extended to Mr M. Mr M didn't agree and he asked for a final decision by an ombudsman.

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 know it will disappoint Mr M, but I'm not upholding this complaint. I'll explain why.

Where the information I've got is incomplete, unclear, or contradictory, as some of it is here, I have to base my decision on the balance of probabilities.

I've read and considered the whole file, but I'll concentrate my comments on what I think is relevant. If I don't comment on any specific point, it's not because I've failed to take it on board and think about it but because I don't think I need to comment on it in order to reach what I think is the right outcome.

I've had a look at first direct's website from the time Mr M wanted to make his payment. The international contact number is listed there, and I don't think it was particularly difficult to find. I found it with a simple google search. The number is also listed on Mr M's statements and on his credit card although I understand that Mr M may have had difficulty accessing either of those while he was abroad. While a payment may not have been possible through the app while Mr M was abroad, I think Mr M could have found the international contact number and called first direct in order to make the payment on time.

I understand that Mr M's efforts to pay funds into the account the direct debits were paid from, were blocked, but that wasn't an account first direct had any control of and it wouldn't be fair to hold them accountable for that. It was Mr M's responsibility to ensure sufficient funds were available.

First direct explained to Mr M that they didn't make any adverse reports to his credit file in relation to this matter but even if they did, I can't say they'd be wrong to do so as there's no dispute a payment was missed. I don't think it would be fair to suggest that the problems Mr M has had with other lenders and credit limits, is anything to do with reports first direct have made to his credit file as they've confirmed they haven't made any.

The terms of Mr M's account with first direct allow them to vary the amount of credit they provide so I can't say they were unreasonable to do so. The reduction didn't financially disadvantage Mr M as he was operating within the reduced limit at the time it was applied.

I don't think there's been a banking error here and I'm not asking first direct to take any action.

My final decision

For the reasons I've given above, I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr M to accept or reject my decision before 9 June 2025.

Phillip McMahon
Ombudsman