DRN-5657682

The complaint

Mr E complains that NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY (NatWest) blocked a payment he wanted to make. And that it gave him poor customer service.

What happened

In October 2024 Mr E attempted to transfer a large sum to an international money transfer provider. The payment was declined and Mr E contacted NatWest. After going through security questions, the adviser told him that the payment had been blocked because there was only a partial match between the beneficiary's name on the account and the sort code. After taking advice from the fraud team, the adviser still maintained the block on the payment.

The next day, Mr E transferred the money to a different bank account of his. He says that he then managed to make the payment from that account without any problems.

Mr E raised a complaint with NatWest and had a few issues with the customer service provided. NatWest paid Mr E £100 compensation. However, it said that it had made no error in respect of blocking the payment and could not give out any further information about this.

On referral to the Financial Ombudsman Service, our Investigator said that NatWest had paid reasonable compensation. He didn't think that NatWest had made any error but was unable to share any further details about why the payment was blocked.

Mr E didn't accept this and the matter has been passed to me for an Ombudsman's consideration.

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 should set out first of all that I can't tell NatWest how to operate its fraud procedures. There are no set rules or regulations for how to do this and each financial institution is left to devise its own procedures. Unless there was a clear error on NatWest's part, which I don't think there was, I can't tell it either that it should or shouldn't have blocked the payment Mr E was attempting to make.

As regards the phone call Mr E made on 29 October, the adviser told him that there was a mismatch between the name and sort code on the account that Mr E was seeking to transfer the money to. They weren't able to tell Mr E anything further. If the adviser was able to see what the correct name should have been, I think Mr E would understand that that information would have had to come from him. The adviser clearly made a judgment in this case. And had to decide, having taken advice from the fraud team, whether to continue to maintain the block. The fact that they did so isn't a matter that it would be reasonable for me to interfere with.

For reasons of confidentiality and keeping the fraud procedures secure, I can't go any further into the reasoning behind the block.

As for Mr E wanting to know why he was able to transfer the money immediately using his other bank account he will appreciate that I simply can't answer that. And it would be pointless for me to speculate on the reasons for it.

With regard to customer service, I understand that Mr E was upset at the length of time he had to wait to speak to an adviser. Although NatWest has explained that it couldn't control the waiting time. Particularly that it can't anticipate how long each customer will want to spend on calls. In connection with that I think it was reasonable for it to have a standard message explaining that customers may need to wait to get their call answered.

NatWest did apologise for not acknowledging Mr E's complaint. And for sending a letter to his postal address when he had asked for it to be sent by e-mail. Mr E did say that in a subsequent call he was cut off by the adviser and says that they were rude to him. No call recording was made of this so I've been unable to listen to the call. However, NatWest has taken on board what Mr E said and has paid him £100 compensation. I think that's a fair and reasonable payment to make in all the circumstances of this case.

My final decision

I don't uphold the complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr E to accept or reject my decision before 5 August 2025.

Ray Lawley
Ombudsman