

The complaint

Mr M complained about the service provided by Barclays Bank UK PLC when he was unable to make an urgent international transfer.

What happened

On 13 March 2025, when Mr M attempted to transfer a four-figure payment from his Barclays account to a third-party account at an overseas bank, Barclays' automated system flagged the transaction for a security review and blocked his online banking access. Mr M contacted Barclays and was able to satisfy Barclays that it was a genuine transaction and the account was unblocked. However, further attempts to make the transaction continued to be blocked by Barclays' automated system.

Mr M complained and spoke to call handlers in different teams at Barclays to try and resolve the problem. On 24 March an attempt was made by one call handler to send the payment a different way. The payment was successfully sent from Mr M's account but not routed to the intended recipient. Ultimately, by 26 March the payment Mr M wanted to make had been safely received in the recipient's account.

Barclays said it could have provided a better service and offered to pay Mr M £150 by way of apology. But Barclays said its automated fraud detection system had worked as designed and it hadn't made any error. It said there had been an incorrect digit in the account number confirmed by Mr M when he was arranging the payment over the phone and this is why that further payment attempt failed after the account was unblocked. Mr M didn't feel this was a satisfactory response and so he brought his complaint to us.

Our investigator thought that Barclays had provided an adequate explanation for what happened and its compensation offer was fair. Mr M disagreed with our investigator and so the complaint comes to me to decide.

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 can understand why what's happened has been upsetting and distressing for Mr M. But having thought about everything, I've independently reached the same overall conclusions as our investigator. I'll explain my reasons.

I've approached this complaint in a way that reflects the informal complaint handling service we provide. My role is to consider the evidence presented by the parties and reach an independent, fair and reasonable decision based on the facts of the case and the evidence provided by both sides. In doing so, I may not address every single detail that's been mentioned and I've summarised what happened only briefly and often in my own words. But it doesn't mean I haven't considered the evidence and what's been said here – it just means I haven't needed to specifically refer to everything in order to reach a decision in this case.

In order to uphold Mr M's complaint and award the redress he is seeking I would have to find that Barclays made an error or acted in a way that wasn't fair and reasonable and this led to Mr M suffering financial loss or some other detriment *and* Barclays hasn't done enough to put things right. So this is the focus of my decision.

Mr M has said there were several facets to his complaint but the crux of his complaint was summed up by Mr M as follows: *'...Barclays prevented me from helping my family out in an emergency! This wasn't just an "inconvenience", it actually threatened my family's home.'* So I can understand his strength of feeling about what happened and what an anxious time this was for him.

He's said that he understands why the first payment attempt was flagged by Barclays and that he has no issue with that. So I don't need to say more about what's been agreed already. I endorse what the investigator said about Barclays needing to operate effective processes to keep customers' money safe. And I am satisfied that is what Barclays was doing here when account restrictions were applied.

Mr M said *'...It's what happened afterwards that concerns me. The moment they were made aware that it was a genuine payment attempt and that it was urgent, yet still continued to block me helping my family in an emergency is deeply worrying.'*

When the payment was subsequently cleared with the fraud team after initially being flagged for a security check, Mr M was led to understand that it should then complete successfully. But whilst it's unfortunate that his own further payment attempts were blocked by Barclays' automated security checks, I'm not persuaded this was the result of any bank error.

This was due to Barclays anti-fraud systems continuing to block Mr M's payment attempts. Barclays hasn't shared any further information about why its systems were triggered by these further payment attempts. But I wouldn't expect it to do so as this is confidential information. And to be clear, the fact alone that Mr M had previously sent successful payments to the same payee is not a reason why a fraud check shouldn't have been applied and it doesn't mean that an error was made when payments were flagged for further checks. Barclays has to comply with legal and regulatory obligations and have processes in place to help ensure it takes reasonable steps to protect customers (and the bank) against fraud and scams. Barclays had an ongoing obligation to monitor the transaction, even after Mr M was able to satisfy its initial checks.

Barclays' terms and conditions, which Mr M would've signed up to in order to be able to use the account, allow Barclays to stop payments being made and restrict account activity in these circumstances. Barclays can't simply rely on Mr M authorising proposed transfers – even in the most urgent situations. So I can't fairly say that Barclays made any error when its internal systems continued to flag the proposed transfer for security checks.

A key part of Mr M's concerns about what happened relates to security questions he was asked by Barclays' fraud team – in particular, he felt there were racist undertones when he was asked for personal details about his relationship with the payee that he feels he wouldn't have been asked had the payee been a different nationality. He described the experience as feeling like an 'interrogation'. I've listened carefully to the call recordings provided and I don't consider Barclays treated Mr M unfairly or unreasonably in this respect. Barclays says it asked him to answer the same questions it would ask anyone in similar circumstances. It's up to Barclays to decide how to complete its security checks. How businesses choose to operate, including the way they implement verification processes, are matters that come under the oversight of the regulator - the Financial Conduct Authority. For this reason, I won't be commenting further on this – except to say that I hope it might reassure Mr M to know that from my own experience of dealing with complaints, the questions Barclays asked Mr M are very typical of the questions banks generally will ask in this sort of situation. I'm very sorry for how what happened made Mr M feel. But I've seen nothing to suggest that Barclays treated Mr M any differently to any other customer in this situation.

When Mr M arranged the payment over the phone, that transfer failed when the receiving bank was unable to identify an account matching the details that Mr M had provided and confirmed. Barclays has made clear (both on the phone to Mr M and in writing) that it isn't seeking to pass the blame for this on to Mr M. Barclays said it has shared this information simply to help him understand why the payment failed. There was some misinformation provided to Mr M during that call but I don't propose to say more about that because Mr M has repeatedly stated that he doesn't have any complaint about the call handler who sent the payment or wish there to be any repercussions for the call handler as a result of that failed transfer. I think it's fair and reasonable however that Barclays has taken this call into account when considering redress – which I'll say more about later.

Mr M mentioned feeling that Barclays disregarded his circumstances and failed to acknowledge or show concern for his personal situation, even though he'd made Barclays aware that he was already struggling with mental health issues. But whilst there were some admitted shortcomings in the service Barclays provided, from what I've seen and heard, I think it's fair to say that the various call handlers he spoke to mostly showed patience and understanding when dealing with Mr M over the phone. Barclays provided feedback to one particular call handler who failed to demonstrate due empathy during a call with Mr M. Barclays also said care indicators have been added on Mr M's profile to help it tailor its services based on his circumstances. And Barclays provided a link to information on its website about the support it can offer, specifically regarding mental health. I can see it has also sent him details of other organisations able to offer additional support should he need it. I hope that's useful – there's also more information about this on our own website: <https://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk/accessibility-services/additional-support>

The block was promptly removed once Barclays was satisfied it was safely able to do so. And fortunately, the situation Mr M was worried about didn't materialise so the delayed payment transfer didn't result in any lasting impact on his family. But Barclays acknowledged that it fell short of providing a reasonable level of customer service overall, including not telling Mr M sooner that it could help with sending the payment over the phone, miscommunication around the incorrectly routed payment and promised call backs that weren't actioned. So I've thought about the question of fair redress.

Our approach to redress is to aim to look at what's fair and reasonable in all the circumstances of a complaint. So my starting point is to think about the impact of Barclays' poor service on Mr M.

I appreciate that a large part of Mr M's anxiety was due to him not knowing if the harm he was anxious to prevent might impact his family before the transfer completed. Happily, that didn't happen, but I can't award compensation for hypothetical issues as it's not within the remit of this service to do so. And we don't usually compensate people specifically for the time they spent dealing their complaint. Our approach is to look at the overall impact of Barclays' admitted serviced failings on Mr M.

The £150 payment Barclays has offered by way of apology seems fair to me in all the circumstances. I haven't seen or heard enough to make me think it would be fair to require Barclays to do more here. I am satisfied this amount matches the level of award I would make in these circumstances had it not already been proposed. It is in line with the amount this service would award in similar cases, and it is fair compensation for Mr M in his particular situation.

I have set out below the steps I require Barclays to take.

Putting things right

Barclays should pay Mr M £150 compensation, as it has already offered to do, to reflect the impact on him of its admitted poor service.

My final decision

My final decision is that I uphold this complaint in part and direct Barclays Bank UK PLC to take the steps set out to put things right for Mr M.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr M to accept or reject my decision before 19 August 2025.

Susan Webb
Ombudsman