

The complaint

Mr S complains about the service provided by TSB Bank plc when it blocked a payment he wanted to make until he phoned to complete further security checks. To put things right Mr S would like TSB to pay him more substantial financial redress than the £50 it offered.

What happened

In October 2024, TSB blocked a transfer Mr S attempted to make from his TSB account to his overseas bank account and then placed restrictions on his account. Mr S was outside the UK at the time and the long periods he was spending on hold when he called inflated the costs involved making international calls.

When Mr S complained to TSB, it said it had tried unsuccessfully at least twice to contact him directly and that the block on his account was in line with its procedures and would remain in place until he completed a form sent to him and called the bank back. TSB said it would review expenses he'd incurred if he sent in details. By way of apology for longer than usual wait times he'd experienced when calling, TSB said it would pay him £50.

Mr S didn't feel this went far enough to resolve things and he brought his complaint to us.

Ultimately, our investigator thought that TSB should've done more to accommodate Mr S given his particular situation. Our investigator thought TSB shouldn't have insisted on Mr S having to phone the bank again after he'd completed and returned a form as the bank had requested. Whilst he didn't agree that it was fair to hold TSB responsible for financial losses that Mr S wanted it to cover, he felt TSB should pay Mr S £200 in respect of distress and inconvenience.

Both Mr S and TSB disagreed with our investigator. Mr S' main point is that £200 isn't enough compensation for what happened. TSB said that it had followed its correct process and that it had made clear to Mr S that it was up to him to make contact in order to enable the account restriction to be lifted.

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.

Having thought about everything I've seen and been told, including listening to the call recordings provided, I've independently reached broadly the same overall conclusions as our investigator. I'll explain why I say this.

The main background facts are not in dispute and have been fully covered in correspondence between the parties already. So I don't need to say more about what happened.

I appreciate that Mr S feels strongly that TSB had no valid reason for blocking the transfer he wanted to make, especially after he'd already successfully completed the first stages of its verification process. But TSB can't simply rely on Mr S approving the proposed payment. TSB has legal and regulatory obligations it has to follow. This means that TSB has to have processes set up to keep customers' money safe. TSB has explained it has fraud prevention measures in place and it identified the need for a check before Mr S' payment could be authorised. The relevant account terms and conditions, which Mr S would've agreed to in order to be able to use his account, allowed TSB to refuse his payment instruction in these circumstances. Given Mr S' account usage and the amount of money involved, I think TSB's anti-fraud checks were reasonable here.

So I don't find that TSB made any error or that it acted unfairly or unreasonably when it blocked the transfer Mr S wanted to make.

The transfer issue has since been resolved. Mr S' main concern now seems to be what it was fair and reasonable to expect TSB (and him) to have done to put things right after blocking his account and I've thought carefully about this.

TSB said the form it required Mr S to complete and return was part of its identification process and the follow-up call was also necessary before TSB could be satisfied it could safely approve Mr S' transfer request. For his part, Mr S said it wasn't made clear to him that he had to phone in again after the online security check and he refused to call. This led to the impasse that has prompted both parties to blame the other for the matter not being resolved sooner.

I don't agree with Mr S that TSB failed to make clear its requirements. TSB's final response letter sent in November 2024 specifically said: *'...Please note that in order for the blocks to be lifted the fraud security needs to be completed by completing the adobe form sent and then calling the non-plastic fraud line on (number provided). We appreciate you are concerned over the cost of these calls, however we can only remove the blocks by following this process or you visiting one of our branches. We will be happy to review your call costs upon receipt of evidence and if appropriate we will cover these for you.'*

I understand the adobe form he completed included information about having to call back. And after doing this the first time, Mr S spoke to someone in a TSB branch who sent out another adobe form and informed him that he needed to call again once completed.

So I think TSB explained the process it wanted Mr S to follow reasonably clearly and it attempted to reassure him about the costs aspect – so this wasn't an impediment to Mr S calling.

Nonetheless, cost alone wasn't the only factor here. I appreciate Mr S faced practical difficulties phoning a UK bank from abroad. It wasn't straightforward for him to phone TSB due to time zone differences and TSB has admitted that he experienced overly long wait times. So I have some sympathy with Mr S refusing to accept that the onus was on him to have to call TSB again.

In November 2024, speaking to TSB again after he'd already called TSB from overseas previously, he said on this occasion he'd made three attempts and spent more than three hours trying to get through. This call lasted more than half an hour and the call handler was sufficiently satisfied that Mr S was able to provide adequate security information for them to be able to discuss his account and the suspended transaction with him in close detail. There's no suggestion that TSB had any concerns that it wasn't speaking to the account holder. The call handler emailed Mr S during that call and he confirmed he'd got the email asking him to complete the adobe form. He subsequently returned two sets of the identification forms that TSB could see came from his registered email address held on TSB's system.

Taking all this into account, I don't consider that TSB's insistence on Mr S having to phone the bank a further time after all this was fair and reasonable in the individual circumstances here, even if TSB may have been following its own internal policies and processes by doing so.

So I've thought about the question of fair redress, which is the main reason Mr S has requested an ombudsman referral. Our approach to redress is to aim to look at what's fair and reasonable in all the circumstances of a complaint. One way we would try and do this impartially here is to put Mr S in the position he'd be in if TSB hadn't been responsible for any poor service issues. So my starting point is to think about the impact on Mr S of what happened.

I've thought first about financial loss. I haven't been provided with anything to show that Mr S is out of pocket as a result of any poor service on the part of TSB. The block was fairly applied so I can't fairly hold TSB responsible for any wider losses Mr S may have incurred.

TSB said it would reimburse call costs if he provided supporting evidence (which seems a reasonable requirement to me) so it's open to Mr S to follow that up with TSB if he wishes.

Fair compensation isn't however just about monetary loss – it also needs to properly reflect the wider impact on Mr S of TSB's service failings.

I don't doubt that TSB's admitted poor service, along with the further shortcomings in the service that I've identified, would've been frustrating and inconvenient for Mr S.

We expect consumers to take reasonable steps themselves to limit the impact of things going wrong. I've kept in mind that Mr S had access to sufficient information that set out, in reasonably clear terms, what TSB required him to do. And I've taken into account that Mr S also said things could've been resolved much sooner if he'd been able to communicate via TSB's mobile chat app, which wasn't an option when his account was blocked. But this doesn't affect my overall view or the outcome here. There were other channels of communication open to Mr S and he could've attempted to phone TSB had he chosen to do so.

But I am satisfied that he was let down by TSB after he returned the completed form and the block wasn't then promptly removed – as I think Mr S was reasonably entitled to expect it would be.

Overall, I think the £200 compensation award proposed by our investigator is fair and reasonable in all the circumstances. It reflects the distress and inconvenience Mr S was caused. Beyond this, I don't agree that Mr S' experience warrants further compensation. I am satisfied that £200 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 S in his particular situation.

Putting things right

TSB should pay Mr S £200 compensation in total, to reflect the impact on him of its poor service. For the avoidance of doubt, TSB can set off against this award the £50 payment it originally offered. This means that if this has been paid already, TSB needs only to pay a further £150.

My final decision

My final decision is that I uphold this complaint and direct TSB Bank plc to take the steps set out to put things right for Mr S.

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

Susan Webb
Ombudsman