

The complaint

Mr E complains about the actions taken by The Royal Bank of Scotland Plc ('RBS') and its failure to allow him access to money in his account.

What happened

In August 2024, Mr E opened a student account. RBS blocked the account when it thought someone purporting to be Mr E phoned asking about an overdraft facility on the account. In response to RBS' request, Mr E attended a branch with ID to verify his identity. RBS had continuing concerns about the security of the account and continued to block Mr E's account until he attended a branch again and it could speak to him.

When Mr E brought this complaint to us, our investigator didn't think that RBS had done anything wrong. He thought that RBS had acted reasonably and in line with its responsibilities to prevent fraud when it applied and subsequently declined to remove account restrictions.

Mr E disagreed with the investigator's view. He mainly said that the investigator hadn't addressed how he was treated with respect to the Equality Act 2010 and that we were condoning RBS denying his access to his funds when he was in serious financial hardship.

Mr E asked for an ombudsman to review the complaint, so it has been passed 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.

This includes listening to the call recordings provided.

Having done so, I've decided not to uphold Mr E's complaint. I'll explain why.

My role is to consider the evidence presented by both parties and reach what I think is an independent, fair and reasonable decision based on the facts of the case. I must be impartial. In order to uphold Mr E's complaint I would have to find that RBS made an error or acted in a way that wasn't fair and reasonable and this led to Mr E suffering financial loss or some other detriment. So I've looked at what happened with this in mind. I've highlighted the main things that I think are relevant when deciding this complaint. If I haven't covered everything that's been mentioned in correspondence, it doesn't mean I haven't considered all the evidence and everything Mr E has said. It just means I haven't needed to refer to everything in the same amount of detail as Mr E to reach a decision. My focus is on the key issue I need to decide – whether RBS has treated Mr E fairly and reasonably overall.

The key background facts are not in dispute – it's agreed that RBS applied restrictions to Mr E's account and so prevented access to the money in the account. So I don't need to say more about what happened.

One of Mr E's main concerns is that RBS (and this service) failed to take into account his multiple disabilities and the law. He put things this way: *'...would you now refer to those ten disabilities and the impact of the Equality Act 2010 of RBS's actions and inactions, as your organisation is also bound by the Equality Act 2010?'*

Our service is unable to make findings on whether or not something constitutes discrimination under the Equality Act 2010. This is because we are an informal alternative to the courts and only a judge can give a formal decision on whether or not the law has been broken. I have however taken into account the relevant law, including the Equality Act 2010, as well as regulatory requirements and best industry practice when deciding whether or not RBS has acted in a fair and reasonable way here.

I appreciate that Mr E feels strongly that RBS had no good reason to deny him access to the money in his account. But I must take into account that RBS has legal requirements it must observe and regulatory obligations imposed by the Financial Conduct Authority ('FCA').

RBS has to have processes in place to help ensure it takes reasonable steps to keep customers' money safe. From listening to the call recordings provided, I can understand why RBS suspected that the person who'd called about Mr E's account wasn't in fact Mr E. And when the caller purported to be Mr E (referring to when he had opened the account as if he were Mr E) and he gave Mr E's date of birth (when asked 'What is your date of birth?'), I can appreciate why RBS was unwilling to discuss the account further and it applied restrictions to the account to protect the money in it.

RBS' terms and conditions, which Mr E would've signed up to in order to be able to use the account, allow it to restrict the account in these circumstances. And how businesses choose to operate and their internal processes come under the oversight of the FCA. Although Mr E has objected to how RBS treated him, it's not for this service to tell RBS how it should act when it has concerns about potential fraud. It's up to RBS to decide how it meets its regulatory obligations. I think it was reasonable that RBS asked Mr E to attend at a branch with ID. Whilst this addressed some of RBS' concerns, further checks later established that RBS couldn't be satisfied that the account was secure.

I can't disclose confidential information that RBS has provided to me about why it took the actions it did. But I am satisfied that it acted fairly and reasonably when it continued to block Mr E's account when RBS (reasonably in my view, based on the information I've seen) wasn't able to be satisfied that Mr E's money wasn't at risk.

I completely understand Mr E's frustration at what happened. But I can also understand why, from RBS' point of view, it had grounds for valid concerns about whether it could safely discuss the account or allow it to be operated until Mr E addressed its concerns – and it was fair and reasonable to require him to attend at a branch again for this purpose.

To sum up, responsibility for taking steps to ensure Mr E's money is kept safe rests with RBS and I am satisfied that it had valid reasons for concerns and that its actions in this situation weren't disproportionate.

I'm sorry for how what happened made Mr E feel. But I've seen nothing to suggest that RBS treated Mr E any differently to any other customer in this situation. And, on balance, for all the reasons set out more fully above, there's not enough evidence to say he was treated unfairly by RBS.

I hope that setting things out as I've done helps explain how I've reached my conclusions.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold this complaint.

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

Susan Webb
Ombudsman