

The complaint

Mr P has complained that HSBC UK Bank Plc ("HSBC UK") applied fees to a payment made into his HSBC Currency Account.

What happened

Mr P paid €3,200 Euros into his HSBC UK Currency Account, but when the payment was received, a €31.50 fee had been applied to the transaction.

Unhappy with this, Mr P complained to HSBC UK as he says he has made payments in Euros into his HSBC UK account previously and no fees were applied to those transactions.

HSBC UK issued its response to Mr P's complaint on 27 May 2025 and it didn't uphold Mr P's complaint. In summary, HSBC UK said that it was the sending bank's responsibility to warn Mr P about any intermediary bank's charges when it set up the payment, and the payment was not charged by HSBC UK, so it was unable to find any error made.

After Mr P referred his complaint to this service, one of our investigators assessed the complaint, and they didn't uphold the complaint. In summary, they said the fee was deducted by an intermediary bank acting on behalf of the sender, and so HSBC UK – as the receiving bank – couldn't reasonably be held responsible for the fee.

Mr P didn't accept the investigator's assessment, so the matter was referred for an ombudsman's decision.

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 reviewed everything, I don't uphold this complaint. I will explain why.

Mr P sent €3,200 from an account he holds with another provider into a HSBC UK Currency Account. According to the information that Mr P provided about HSBC's Currency Account, it says that HSBC UK doesn't charge any fees to receive money into the Currency Account. Therefore, I can understand why Mr P was unhappy when he only received €3,168.50 into his account – especially as the amount sent was in Euros and so no foreign exchange was needed for the payment.

When looking into matters, HSBC UK has confirmed that an overseas intermediary bank had applied a €31.50 fee to process the payment.

I note that the bank that applied the fee was another bank within the HSBC group of companies. However, as HSBC UK and the investigator pointed out, the intermediary bank in question is a separate entity to HSBC UK. So, I can't consider its actions within this complaint - that is, unless it was acting on behalf of HSBC UK for this particular transaction.

HSBC UK says that the intermediary bank that applied that fee had been appointed by the sender of the funds. This looks to be the case, because on the Advice of Credit receipt, where it lists any charges that HSBC UK may've applied it says: "Charges: 0.00". Whereas at the bottom of the receipt it says: "Senders Charges: €31.50".

In such circumstances, as HSBC UK was the receiving bank, I can't reasonably hold it responsible for charges applied by the intermediary bank, as the intermediary bank who deducted the charges was acting on behalf of the sender. Therefore, I can't say that HSBC UK has done anything wrong here or has acted unfairly or unreasonably.

Since the investigator issued their assessment, Mr P says that the business he sent the money through has since refunded him the €31.50 fee. This again suggests that it was the sender who charged him the fee, rather than HSBC UK. And as the fee has since been refunded to him, even if I were to conclude that HSBC UK had done something wrong here (or that the intermediary bank was in fact acting on behalf of HSBC UK), I can't see that Mr P has incurred a financial loss.

Even though Mr P has since been reimbursed the fee, Mr P asked for an ombudsman to consider his complaint. He wanted an ombudsman to consider whether HSBC UK's communications meet the standards of clarity and fairness expected under FCA Principles 6 and 7. He also wanted an ombudsman to consider whether HSBC UK should be required to amend or clarify its product information to avoid misleading customers in future.

Looking at the document that Mr P sent this service about the Currency Account, it explains when charges may be applied by HSBC UK, when sending money. It also says account holders won't be charged (by HSBC UK) to receive money into the Currency Account. And in Mr P's case, HSBC UK didn't charge him anything to receive money into his account. So, I can't say that Mr P has been misled here.

In terms of whether HSBC UK should amend or clarify its product information, as has been explained by the investigator, it is beyond the remit of this service to tell financial business how they should operate, or to dictate what terms and conditions they should apply to their products. So that is not something that this service, or I within this decision, can do.

My final decision

Because of the reasons given above, I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr P to accept or reject my decision before 2 October 2025.

Thomas White
Ombudsman