

The complaint

Mr A complained about HSBC UK Bank Plc after it blocked a payment he attempted to make when he urgently needed to amend his travel arrangements. The resulting delay meant he missed his flight and had to buy new tickets.

He wants HSBC to reimburse the full cost of replacement flights and pay additional compensation for the inconvenience and distress caused.

What happened

On 23 July 2025, HSBC declined a payment Mr A tried to send to an online travel agency (I'll refer to as 'A'). He made further unsuccessful attempts to send the payment using his bank card but missed check-in for his booked flight.

The next day, Mr A contacted HSBC. After completing security checks with its fraud team, the card was unblocked. Mr A then tried, without success, to pay an airline ('P') for flights. HSBC said it had no record of any attempted transactions to P.

When Mr A complained, HSBC said that its fraud detection system had flagged a potentially suspicious payment, which led to the temporary card block and declined payment he'd experienced at the airport. HSBC said its process includes sending notifications via mobile banking or text for customers to confirm payments, but this wasn't possible here. Instead, Mr A was placed in a queue for a call within 48 hours – though he contacted HSBC first. HSBC said there had been no bank error with the payment decline, or the process followed, but recognised what happened had been inconvenient for Mr A and paid him £50 as a goodwill gesture.

Our investigator considered this a fair outcome and didn't hold HSBC responsible for Mr A missing his flight or the subsequent costs. Mr A disagreed, so the complaint came to me for a final 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.

I understand why this situation was frustrating for Mr A. But having thought about everything, I agree with the investigator. I'll explain why.

Mr A said *'The main issue in my complaint is ... HSBC's failure to properly process and authorise legitimate payment transactions when I urgently needed to change my flight booking.'*

To uphold Mr A's complaint and award the compensation he seeks, I would need to find that HSBC made an error or acted in a way that wasn't fair and reasonable. So I've looked at what happened with this in mind.

Declined payment to A

HSBC's fraud detection system flagged a payment for additional checks before authorisation. These checks are designed to protect customers' money and prevent fraudulent activity.

The account terms and conditions, which Mr A agreed to when opening his account, allow HSBC to refuse payment instructions in such circumstances.

HSBC acted promptly to remove the restrictions once Mr A made contact.

HSBC must comply with legal and regulatory requirements and has a duty of care to protect customers' funds. It is ultimately HSBC's decision whether to authorise a payment and I am satisfied it acted in line with its obligations when it declined Mr A's payment attempts to A.

The fact that Mr A didn't receive any alert from HSBC about this isn't a reason for me to uphold this complaint. HSBC's process in this situation was to add Mr A's name to a list for a phone call within 48 hours – which I think is a broadly reasonable timescale generally. HSBC couldn't have known that Mr A's particular situation was time-critical. Mr A could've chosen to contact HSBC sooner himself - but he didn't do this until the following day.

I appreciate that Mr A later on had experience of having to wait for 20-30 minutes to get through to HSBC's fraud team. But had he called from the airport after the first decline, it's possible the payment could have been authorised in time. He spent at least 45 minutes retrying the payment to A, so there's no reason to assume he would have missed check-in due to call wait times.

For these reasons, I don't consider that HSBC acted unfairly or unreasonably when it blocked Mr A's card and declined the attempted payment to A.

Payment to P

Despite Mr A's comments, HSBC's system shows no record of attempted payments to P. Other transactions are visible, but none from P. The investigator suggested that this could be because of a problem with P's bank resulting in the payment request not being forwarded to HSBC to authorise and that seems the most likely explanation to me.

I can't fairly hold HSBC responsible for this.

I'm sorry this was all so frustrating for Mr A and that he incurred additional expenses as a result of what happened. But, as I've found that HSBC acted fairly and reasonably in accordance with its terms and conditions, it wouldn't be reasonable to require HSBC to pay him anything more.

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 Mr A's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr A to accept or reject my decision before 26 January 2026.

Susan Webb
Ombudsman

