

## **The complaint**

Mr W complains that Monzo Bank Limited didn't do enough to support him when he was gambling.

### **What happened**

Mr W has a Monzo account.

He complained to Monzo that he'd been able to gamble significant amounts of money (in the region of £10,000 over a period of about 12-15 months) despite apparently being registered with GamStop and having a gambling block in place with Monzo. Mr W felt this undermined the protection he thought he had from Monzo. And he doesn't think Monzo had done enough to support him given his vulnerabilities.

Monzo looked into Mr W's complaint, but it didn't uphold it. It explained that the gambling block was intended to prevent Mr W's account from being used to fund gambling. However, it said there are limitations - for instance if it's not obvious that a transaction is for gambling given the merchant code (MCC) used. So, it couldn't guarantee all similar transactions would be blocked. It felt it had attempted to assist Mr W as best it could – including blocking individual merchants where needed.

Mr W didn't agree with Monzo's response, so he brought his complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

One of our Investigators reviewed Mr W's complaint, but he didn't uphold it. He noted that Mr W had also authorised some payments using the faster payment method, which wouldn't have been stopped by the gambling block. The Investigator felt Monzo had responded positively by blocking payments where Mr W had identified that a merchant was a gambling operator. Overall, he felt Monzo had acted reasonably.

Mr W didn't accept the Investigator's opinion and provided further comments in response. He asked an Ombudsman to consider the matter afresh. It's 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.

Mr W has described, in some detail, the difficulties he's faced as a result of his gambling problems. I recognise that it's been a very challenging time for him and I'm grateful for his honest account of what's happened. I've thought about everything he's said very carefully in order to decide whether Monzo acted fairly and reasonably overall. However, I haven't commented on everything Mr W has said. Instead, I've focused on the issues at the heart of Mr W's complaint and the reasons for my decision.

#### *Monzo's gambling block*

Mr W feels that the gambling block failed seeing as he was able to make gambling related payments whilst it was activated. Whilst there is evidence of continued gambling activity whilst the block was activated, I don't agree that's because it failed or didn't otherwise act as expected.

The block generally only works for UK based gambling sites that use the correct MCC. However, there are lots of overseas sites that use a different code, but the block won't stop those payments. Looking at the evidence, it seems that Mr W was also using faster payments at times including with overseas sites or transfer companies. I don't think the block would stop those payments.

Monzo's website also makes it clear that it can be tricky to block certain payments if it's not obvious that they relate to gambling. So, it by no means guarantees to block all gambling payments as Mr W seems to be suggesting.

Unfortunately, looking at the way Mr W carried out some of his gambling activity, I don't think the gambling block could have prevented all gambling transactions in the way he might have hoped. Whilst I can understand his position, I don't agree that means the gambling block didn't work (there's evidence to show it did at times) or that Monzo failed to provide the level of protection it promises.

### *Monzo's wider support*

Although Mr W does accept that Monzo's specialist team was in touch with him at various points, it's evident he was looking for something more. It's worth saying here that banks are expected to recognise a consumer's challenges and vulnerabilities and offer useful and tailored support as far as possible.

I've given very careful thought to whether Monzo acted fairly and reasonably and otherwise provided the kind of support I'd generally expect in a situation like this. And overall, I'm satisfied it did. I know that Mr W will find this news disappointing, so I hope the reasons I've given below are helpful in understanding how I've arrived at this position.

When Mr W first raised his gambling concerns with Monzo around June 2024 (which appears to be fairly soon after he opened the account), he was clearly already aware that the gambling block wasn't working for certain merchants. It's evident he was looking for further help from Monzo, such as placing blocks on specific merchants.

I can see that Monzo quickly escalated the matter following Mr W's contact. I think that was important to make sure he got appropriate support. I can also see he had an online chat with an agent soon after. I think Monzo could perhaps have explained to Mr W at this point why the block didn't work for certain merchants (as it did a few weeks later, as I'll touch on below). Nevertheless, I'm satisfied it offered practical support by asking Mr W if he wanted to block "*some merchants*". Mr W then gave the name of a specific merchant he was looking to block and the evidence suggests that Monzo acted quickly to do that.

But it didn't just leave things there. Monzo's specialist team also contacted Mr W less than a week later. Noting that the gambling block was in place, it asked Mr W about his general well-being and said he should get in touch if needed, so it could talk him through other ways it might be able to help. Another agent from the specialist team contacted Mr W soon after and asked him to get in touch if he needed links to external organisations that might help him. I'm satisfied those were also reasonable steps for Monzo to take. And Mr W was clearly happy with Monzo's support at that point as he thanked it for getting in touch.

However, I can see he sought Monzo's help a few weeks later. And Monzo's specialist team again contacted him. At this point Monzo explained MCCs in some detail and that not all transactions could be stopped by the gambling block (as it wasn't always obvious they related to gambling). So even if Mr W wasn't aware before of the reasons why not all transactions could be stopped by the gambling block, he was at this point.

Mr W thinks that Monzo should have tried to identify disguised gambling transactions in real time rather than him having to block individual merchants given his known vulnerability. He's cited one merchant in particular that Monzo blocked after he reported it, although I'm aware that Monzo's since gone on to block further merchants at Mr W's request.

Merchants who use non gambling MCCs do so because it allows their customers to circumvent MCC based gambling blocks. And I don't think, as Mr W appears to be suggesting, that it's proportionate to expect Monzo to carry out widespread searches on a regular basis to try and find gambling merchants who are processing payments using non-gambling MCCs.

As I've touched on, I'm satisfied Mr W was aware, through Monzo's support, that blocking merchants was another available option. And I think it was open to him to take similar and earlier steps concerning other merchants if he thought it necessary. However, given some of the later activity on the account, I think it's likely, on balance, that Mr W would have found other ways to gamble even if more merchant blocks had been in place at an earlier point.

Mr W feels that certain activity on his account ought to have triggered internal risk or vulnerability alerts meaning Monzo needed to intervene. Whilst, again, I accept Mr W may have been expecting much more, I don't agree that means Monzo didn't intervene or provide appropriate help.

I've already touched on the fact that Monzo's specialist support team was in touch with Mr W at various points - something Mr W himself acknowledges. Whilst some of the contact arose as a result of Mr W getting in touch first, that wasn't always the case. There's evidence of proactive approaches on Monzo's part. I can see that on one particular occasion, Monzo asked Mr W about his mental health and what support he was receiving. Although it doesn't appear that the conversation progressed much more at that point, I'm nevertheless satisfied it shows some proactive intervention on Monzo's part.

At other points Monzo described further help it could offer such as reducing spending limits on the account. Again, this is evidence to show Monzo engaged with Mr W and tried to offer support. Mr W also contacted Monzo about updating his daily spending limit (having previously reduced his limit). I can see that Monzo again asked Mr W if he needed any help.

On another occasion, I can see that one of Monzo's specialists asked Mr W how he was getting on with his gambling issues and what a spending limit increase would be used for. I'm satisfied that in itself shows the contact must have triggered some form of internal alert, causing Monzo to take some follow up action. It was presumably also intended to apply a degree of friction to allow Mr W to pause before increasing his spending limit. Mr W indicated that his gambling was under control at that point and that the limit increase was to be used for everyday purchases.

## **Summary**

I have absolutely no doubt that this has been an incredibly difficult time for Mr W and I'm acutely aware that these matters have impacted his mental health. But, overall, it seems to me that it was Mr W's compulsion to spend that likely drove him to gambling, as opposed to a lack of appropriate support from Monzo. And whilst I don't necessarily think Monzo could be expected to offer the kind of wider support that Mr W likely needed, I think it was reasonable for it to ask him about external support he was already receiving (as it clearly did) and to mention the internal tools available.

Based on everything I've described above, I'm satisfied that Monzo tried to help Mr W by offering the kind of support I'd typically expect. And that it did so in a sensitive and generally timely way. It follows therefore that I can't fairly conclude Monzo is responsible for the losses Mr W suffered.

**My final decision**

I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr W to accept or reject my decision before 29 April 2026.

Amanda Scott  
**Ombudsman**