

The complaint and what happened

Miss S complains that HSBC UK Bank Plc (“HSBC”) didn’t do enough to protect her when she fell victim to an employment scam.

Our investigator didn’t uphold the complaint. He didn’t think that HSBC ought to have been concerned about the payment of £1,500 Miss S was making based on its value and given that a pattern couldn’t be identified from a single transaction. He acknowledged that transactions to a different beneficiary the day before had failed but noted that this was due to an issue with the recipient.

Based on the evidence available, the investigator didn’t think that an intervention for the payment that was successfully made was warranted or that it would have stopped Miss S from proceeding. This was because when other financial providers intervened or blocked payments, Miss S provided inaccurate responses to the questions posed and used alternative methods to make the payments.

Miss S disagreed. She explained how the scammer told her exactly what to tell the banks. She also said that, given HSBC and another financial provider had blocked payments and questioned her, it showed the payments were unusual and should have triggered deeper intervention. And that the pattern of behaviour was clearly out of character.

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 taken into account longstanding regulatory expectations and requirements, and what I consider to be good industry practice, I agree HSBC ought to have been on the look-out for the possibility of fraud and made additional checks before processing payments in some circumstances.

I have reviewed the payment Miss S made to the scam. Having considered its value and who it was made to, I’m not persuaded HSBC ought to have found the payment suspicious, such that it ought to have made enquiries of Miss S before processing it.

I say this as the payment was a one-off transaction for £1,500 and it was being made to a legitimate international money transfer provider. I think, without other concerning factors, that it would have been disproportionate to expect HSBC to have intervened here.

I do acknowledge that Miss S had made several attempts, for the same amount (plus fees), to a different international money transfer provider the day before. But these payments repeatedly failed, so it doesn’t strike me as overly concerning that Miss S made further attempts to pay – she had clearly wanted to make the payment and, as it hadn’t yet gone through successfully, it seems somewhat logical that she would continue until it succeeded.

This resulted in a call with HSBC. But the focus of this call was to ensure that it was genuinely Miss S who was attempting to make the payments. And HSBC was satisfied that it was. So the disputed payment made the following day was successful.

In the circumstances, I don't consider it unreasonable that HSBC didn't probe further about the reason behind Miss S's attempted payments. There was no indication that Miss S wanted to make the payment more than once so, as referenced above, HSBC would have seen that Miss S was attempting to make a single transaction to a legitimate provider for an amount that wasn't so high it ought to have appeared concerning. And the following day, she successfully completed the transaction, that had so far failed, to a different provider.

I wouldn't have expected HSBC to have intervened at the time of the disputed payment so I don't consider it relevant to detail what would likely have happened if it had. But I'll touch on this for the sake of completeness. And I note that, just as Miss S has said, she was extensively coached by the scammer and was told what to say to avoid alerting her financial providers to what was really happening. So, had HSBC intervened at the time of the disputed payment, I think Miss S would have been likely to provide inaccurate answers, under the guidance of the scammer, to ensure her payment was processed.

Miss S has undoubtedly been the victim of a cruel and manipulative scam. I'm sorry to learn how much she lost as a result, and I acknowledge the lasting impact to her of this. But to uphold this complaint, I'd need to be persuaded that there were failings on HSBC's part which led to her losses. And, for the reasons given, I don't think HSBC acted in error by its actions (or inactions) in this case. I appreciate Miss S was coached extensively by the scammer. But I can't reasonably expect HSBC to have uncovered this when there weren't enough concerns about the payments being made to require an intervention at the time of the disputed payments.

My final decision

For the reasons given, I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss S to accept or reject my decision before 20 March 2026.

Melanie van der Waals
Ombudsman