

The complaint

Ms F complains about the action Bank of Scotland plc trading as Halifax took in relation to suspected security breaches on her account. She complains her card was blocked and that she spent a lot of time trying to resolve the issue.

What happened

Ms F was attempting to make transfers to an account she held with another provider when she encountered a block. She contacted Halifax via its chat facility to query this and was presented with a list of transactions to check. She highlighted the unrecognised transactions and left the chat under the impression her card would be unblocked.

Unfortunately, Ms F still encountered problems while making her transfers and contacted Halifax again. She was given further lists of transactions to look through, but said she found them difficult to review as the transactions appeared 'scrambled'. She asked for a PDF of the transactions to be sent to her, to which Halifax's agent appeared to agree.

Halifax's agent assured her the transactions she didn't recognise hadn't debited her account. But they said that, in order to protect Ms F's account, Halifax would need to cancel her card and send her another. Ms F shared concerns that her account had been 'hacked' and said she had kept her card secure. She said that cancelling her card before she received a replacement would cause her great difficulty.

Unhappy with the way Halifax had handled the situation, Ms F complained. Halifax upheld her complaint in part. It said that, despite Ms F stating she didn't recognise a transaction, the fraud block was kept in place, and that the block could cause problems with certain transactions. It apologised and paid £50 into Ms F's account. But, to remove the fraud block, it said she would need to speak with Halifax's fraud team again.

Ms F wasn't satisfied and brought her complaint to our service. She noted that some of the transactions she'd been asked to check were several months old, so she had concerns about the level of protection Halifax had applied to her account. She raised unhappiness with the general service and questioning during her interactions with Halifax's agents. She said that not having access to her money when she needed it, coupled with the time the issue took to resolve, had negatively impacted her health and mental health, as well as her wellbeing and quality of life.

Our Investigator looked into things. She noted that Halifax had offered a further £50 upon the complaint being referred to our service, bringing the total to £100 for the distress and inconvenience caused. The Investigator found Halifax had fairly applied the block, and that its presentation of transactions had allowed Ms F to spot the attempted payments she didn't recognise. She felt the total offer of £100 fairly made up for the inconvenience and added that if Ms F wanted to remove the block, she would need to speak with Halifax.

Ms F didn't agree, she was unhappy that her card had been blocked without notification. She pointed out she hadn't been sent a PDF and so she was unable to check the transactions. As no agreement could be reached, the case was 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.

Having done so, I agree with the overall outcome arrived at by the investigator. Because of this, I uphold this complaint in part. I realise this will be disappointing for Ms F, and so I've provided the reasons for my decision below.

I should explain that my role here is to think about the individual circumstances of this complaint and whether Halifax did something wrong which caused Ms F to lose out as a result. If I think Halifax did something wrong, I can then think about what – if anything – it should do to set matters right. To help me with this, I've taken into account Ms F's detailed submissions regarding her complaint issues. But if there's something I've not mentioned, it isn't because I've ignored it – I haven't. I'm satisfied I don't need to comment on every individual point or argument to be able to reach what I think is the right outcome. Our rules allow me to do this. This simply reflects the informal nature of our service as a free alternative to the courts.

Turning to the blocks applied to Ms F's account and card, Halifax should be on the lookout for transactions that appear to be out of character or unusual – or any other signs that might indicate its customers are at risk of fraud. The bank, with its increased knowledge of what fraud and scams can look and feel like, was concerned about particular activity and, as per its terms, took what I consider to be appropriate action by applying blocks. Given the fast-moving nature of fraud and scams, I wouldn't necessarily expect a business to give notice for a block as, to do so, would, amongst other things, delay the process and therefore lead to further potential harm.

Ms F has raised concerns about some of the older transactions Halifax flagged for her. While I certainly understand her fears here, Halifax is under no obligation to keep its concerns static; often, new information can highlight potential issues which may not have been identified previously. And so, I'm unable to agree this is indicative of a failing by Halifax to keep Ms F's account secure. In any case, I've been presented with no evidence to show me that Ms F suffered a financial loss on her account as a result of the matters covered in this decision. Indeed, Halifax has confirmed that the unrecognised transactions Ms F identified have not debited the account, and I've received no evidence to the contrary.

I note Ms F's unhappiness at having not received a PDF document of the transactions Halifax's agent flagged to her, and I can understand why she would be frustrated at this. As mentioned, my role here is to assess the *impact* of any failing by the business. To help me understand Ms F's comments that the transactions she was presented with were scrambled or mismatched, I've checked a selection of them against her corresponding statements – statements which she has access to. And while I can see a small difference in the applicable date – usually several days, likely due to the difference between transaction and posting dates – the merchant and amount for the transactions I've looked at all appear to match. Because of this, I agree with the Investigator's finding that Halifax provided enough information for Ms F to review and highlight any transactions she was concerned about. This means that, while I share Ms F's disappointment that she hasn't received a PDF, I don't think this has caused her to lose out to a degree for which I think further compensation would be warranted.

Ms F has raised concerns over the general security of her account, but also with Halifax's approach to blocking her card or account. She has mentioned the block at the centre of this case isn't the first time Halifax has used some form of restriction on her account. But in order for a business to effectively protect its customer's account, it must be able to fairly work

within its terms to utilise tools such as blocks for occasions when, for example, its complex algorithms pick up on concerning activity. And while I don't doubt the experience has been inconvenient for Ms F, with Halifax having, at times, offered poor service, I'm not persuaded it would be fair for me to direct Halifax to pay further compensation. Given what I understand of the impact of Halifax's failings, had this case not come to me with an offer of £100, this is around the amount I would likely have directed Halifax to pay.

And so, while I realise this won't be the answer Ms F wanted, I won't be directing Halifax to do anything else beyond honour the offer it has made through our service. That means that if Ms F hasn't already done so, she may wish to speak with Halifax's fraud department to remove the block on her card, as recommended by Halifax in its final response letter to her.

My final decision

My final decision is I uphold this complaint in part and direct Bank of Scotland plc trading as Halifax to pay Ms F £100, less anything already paid in relation to this complaint, within 28 days of her acceptance of this decision.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms F to accept or reject my decision before 25 March 2026.

James Akehurst
Ombudsman