

The complaint

Mr A complains that Monzo Bank Limited blocked a payment which he wanted to make to purchase flights. By the time he was able to complete the payment, the cost of the flights had increased by more than £400. Mr A wants Monzo to compensate him for that loss.

What happened

In September 2025 Mr A tried to book flights costing a little under £3,500 for him and his family. He says that he and his wife initially tried to pay using her credit card, but the payment was declined. They therefore decided to move funds into his Monzo account and pay with his debit card. However, that payment was also declined and his account was blocked.

Mr A contacted Monzo to explain that (i) the payment was genuine and (ii) prices were dynamic, meaning that it was important that the account and card blocks were lifted without delay. If that did not happen, it was likely he would have to pay more.

Monzo said that a specialist would need to look into the matter. That was arranged and the blocks were lifted later the same day. In total, Mr A's account and card had been blocked for about an hour and a quarter. He was able to complete the booking, but by then the price had increased by more than £400.

Monzo said that it had acted correctly. Its security systems had flagged the payment as potentially fraudulent and its standard procedure in such cases is to block the account while it investigates. It had completed its investigation within a reasonable timeframe and could not therefore be held responsible for Mr A's losses.

Mr A did not accept Monzo's assessment and referred the matter to this service, where one of our investigators considered what had happened. She did not, however, recommend that the complaint be upheld, for broadly the same reasons as Monzo. Mr A did not accept the investigator's conclusions and asked that an ombudsman review the case.

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 accept, as Mr A says, that the delay in booking his flights meant that he had to pay more than £400 more than he would have paid an hour earlier. And I accept too that the delay was the result of Monzo's actions in stopping the initial card payment and blocking Mr A's account. However, I can only hold Monzo responsible for his loss if it has acted incorrectly and if I consider it fair and reasonable to do so.

Like other banks, Monzo has fraud detection and prevention systems to protect itself and its customers from fraud and scams. How those systems work is, of course, commercially sensitive, but most will be triggered automatically and by a combination of factors, including the value of a payment, whether a transaction is unusual, and the nature of the recipient.

How banks manage security alerts is largely a matter for their own commercial judgment. As Mr A has noted, some will require a customer to confirm a payment through an app or online, others will make a single telephone call to the customer. In this case, Monzo passed the matter to a specialist to deal with. Its process did not allow for the payment to be cleared when Mr A made contact.

Here, I think the payment was unusual, and it was for significantly more than most transactions on Mr A's account. I can understand therefore why it triggered a security alert. It may also be relevant that it followed a number of transfers into the account on the same day – which were made in part to ensure that there were sufficient funds in the account to pay for the flights.

I can understand Mr A's argument that it should have been possible to check that the payment was genuine by other means, such as in-app approval. Many banks do provide such options, but it is not for me to tell Monzo what systems it should adopt. That is a matter for its own commercial judgment.

It is unfortunate that, in this particular case, the price of the flights had risen by the time the blocks were lifted. But I don't think I can fairly say the time for which the account could not be used was unreasonable in the circumstances.

My final decision

For these reasons, my final decision is that I do not 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 21 May 2026.

Mike Ingram
Ombudsman