

complaint

Ms A complains that HSBC Bank Plc had unfair and unreasonable security questions when she asked for a valuation of her individual savings account (ISA). She also says she was not made aware there had been changes to the security procedures.

background

Our adjudicator didn't think HSBC had acted unfairly. She said it was entitled to ask questions to ensure it established Ms A's identity. HSBC had also sent a valuation to Ms A by post. Although Ms A said this was unclear, the adjudicator felt it contained all the relevant information.

Ms A didn't accept the adjudicator's opinion. In response, she said:

- She has still not been provided with a security code. So she is effectively "locked out" of her account.
- She asked for a code, but wasn't given one.
- During her first conversation with the call centre, HSBC assumed she banked with them. But she has never banked with HSBC.
- It seems odd she has to retain prior statements in order to satisfy the security requirements.
- She doesn't face the same problems with an investment she holds with another provider.
- HSBC has failed to communicate with her, or apologise for its actions.

As the matter remains unresolved, it has been passed to me for review.

my findings

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

I should firstly say that a financial business is entitled to put procedures in place to ensure customer security and confidentiality. Such procedures are a matter of its commercial judgement, and not something in which this service will normally interfere.

But I have considered the circumstances that caused Ms A to complain.

I note she called HSBC in February 2015 asking for a valuation of her ISA. She was asked a number of security questions, but was unfortunately unable to answer all of these. As a result, HSBC couldn't give a valuation over the phone. Instead, the representative said it would be sent by post.

I appreciate Ms A was unhappy with the questions she was asked. But overall I don't find them unreasonable. She was asked how much she had originally invested, and when this was. Because the investment was made many years ago, Ms A was unable to recall these details. But she was given the option of finding the relevant paperwork relating to her investment which would contain the information. This includes the annual statement.

While Ms A says the statement she was sent was unclear, I am unable to agree. I think it contained all the relevant details of her ISA, including the current value. The statement

seems to be the normal format for how HSBC provides its customers with such information. The ombudsman service will not normally tell a business how it should convey information to its customers. This role is performed by the regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority.

Ms A is also unhappy HSBC changed its security process, but didn't tell her. However, a business is entitled to make such changes from time to time. I understand a recorded message was given when someone called. But in any event, if Ms A didn't initially have the details to hand, she could have found them and asked for a valuation in a further call.

Ms A has also referred to using a security code. This is one way she will be able to access details of her investment. But it will be necessary for the security code to be set up. I cannot find that Ms A asked at any point for this to be done.

Although Ms A doesn't bank with HSBC, I understand this will not prevent her from setting up a security code. Alternatively, this can be done over the phone. If this is something that is of interest to Ms A, she should contact HSBC to make the appropriate arrangements.

my final decision

I do not uphold the complaint and I make no award.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms A to accept or reject my decision before 18 February 2016.

Doug Mansell
ombudsman