



## **The complaint**

Mr M complains about charges applied by HSBC UK Bank Plc when he used his debit card and withdrew cash whilst abroad.

## **What happened**

In early 2023 Mr M travelled abroad for medical care. Mr M's explained that he wasn't aware that HSBC would charge him for using his debit card or withdrawing cash in a foreign currency whilst abroad.

HSBC applied charges totalling £897.30 in relation to payments Mr M made using his debit card and cash withdrawals. Mr M went on to raise a complaint with HSBC and it issued a final response on 23 May 2023. HSBC didn't agree it had made a mistake and said the charges applied were in line with terms and conditions of Mr M's account. HSBC's final response added Mr M had told its staff he didn't check about potential charges or tell it before travelling abroad and using his bank card.

Mr M referred his complaint to this service and it was passed to an investigator. They thought HSBC had dealt with Mr M's complaint fairly and applied the charges in line with its terms and conditions. The investigator didn't uphold Mr M's complaint. Mr M asked to appeal, so his complaint has been passed to me to make a decision.

## **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'm aware I've summarised the events surrounding this complaint in less detail than the parties involved. No discourtesy is intended by my approach which reflects the informal nature of this service. I want to assure all parties I've read and considered everything on file. I'm satisfied I don't need to comment on every point raised to fairly reach my decision. And if I don't comment on something, it's not because I haven't considered it. It's because I've focused on what I think are the key issues. My approach is in line with the rules we operate under.

I understand Mr M had to travel abroad for an extended period to receive medical treatment and used his debit card to pay. Mr M also used his debit card to access cash as well. For both transactions, HSBC applied charges when Mr M used his card. I'll start by saying I've checked the terms and conditions of Mr M's account with HSBC which form the basis of the agreement on how his account works. The terms say HSBC will apply a 2.75% fee when making a debit card payment in a foreign currency. The terms also say HSBC will apply a cash handling fee when withdrawing cash in a foreign currency whilst abroad. HSBC has provided evidence to show all the fees Mr M incurred and I'm satisfied they were correctly applied – in line with the terms and conditions.

When bringing his complaint, Mr M explained he wasn't aware of the charges before travelling abroad. And Mr M's advised there were alternative accounts and services available

which could've saved him money whilst abroad. I take Mr M's point, but HSBC wasn't aware he was travelling abroad or how long he'd be away. And there's nothing to show Mr M checked with HSBC before he left the UK to see whether any fees or charges would be incurred by using his account in the way he did. Had Mr M checked, I think it's more likely than not HSBC's staff would've told him about the charges for using his card overseas.

I've looked at the information HSBC provides about the fees and charges it applies. I understand the terms and conditions are lengthy and the foreign transaction fees form part of a larger document. But HSBC also issues a tariff of charges setting out all the fees it may charge for using an account. The tariff of charges is a short document and includes the charges HSBC applies when making a debit card payment or withdrawing cash in a foreign currency. HSBC has also explained that it issues an annual Statement of Fees which gives details of charges it can apply. In addition, HSBC's website contains full details of the fees it charges customers for operating their account whilst abroad.

So, whilst I accept Mr M wasn't specifically notified before he left the UK and went on to use his bank card, I'm satisfied HSBC made the information available in a number of places and that it clearly explains the circumstances under which charges will be applied.

In response to the investigator, Mr M pointed out there may've been more suitable accounts available that would've led to lower charges. But as HSBC wasn't aware of Mr M's need to travel abroad and use his account to pay for medical expenses, I'm not persuaded it could've been aware there were other accounts that would've potentially been suitable for Mr M's circumstances.

I'm very sorry to disappoint Mr M but as I haven't been persuaded that HSBC unfairly or incorrectly applied charges when he used his debit card or withdrew cash in a foreign currency whilst overseas, I'm not telling it to do anything else.

### **My final decision**

My decision is that I don't uphold Mr M's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr M to accept or reject my decision before 5 January 2024.

Marco Manente  
**Ombudsman**