

The complaint

Ms M complains that Bank of Scotland plc (BoS) blocked her international transfer on multiple occasions and hasn't provided her with a clear reason why or assurances that it won't happen again.

What happened

Ms M has explained that she relocated to Ireland from overseas and had retained several BoS accounts. In December 2022, she tried to make an international payment to purchase a car, but the transaction was declined, and she was told her account had been suspended. She called the number given which she says was incorrect and was then transferred to the fraud team. She answered the required questions and was told that her access had been returned and she could proceed with the payment. However, her second payment attempt was also blocked, and she was required to go through the same process of answering questions. Unfortunately, Ms M's third transaction attempt was also blocked.

Ms M raised a complaint but was returned to the fraud team. She went through numerous checks and was told everything was fine but when she tried the payment it was declined. Ms M contacted the complaints team saying she wanted the issue resolved.

BoS issued a final response letter dated 29 December 2022. It upheld Ms M's complaint and offered her a total of £170 to cover the cost of the calls she had made and the distress and inconvenience she had been caused. It noted that Ms M's transaction had been stopped on three occasions and said that when a transaction is confirmed as genuine this should minimise the risk of it being stopped again but it cannot guarantee that a further security check won't take place.

Ms M said that BoS hadn't addressed her main concern which was that it wasn't able to guarantee that she would be able to make her payment. She said her concern is that BoS's fraud checks are excessive. Due to the issues she decided to transfer money from her BoS account to another account in her name and was able to successfully make the payment from there.

Our investigator thought the apology and compensation provided by BoS in this case was reasonable, so they didn't require it to do anything further.

Ms M didn't agree with our investigator's view. She said she had never been provided with an explanation for the problem and despite several attempts by different staff the issue wasn't resolved. She said if BoS don't know why she was repeatedly stopped from making the payment it will happen again. She said that while BoS offered her money she didn't accept this, and that while it apologised it didn't give an explanation or assurances that this wouldn't happen on future transactions.

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 understand why Ms M is frustrated by the response to her complaint as she hasn't been given a specific reason why her payment was blocked on several occasions and BoS hasn't been able to guarantee that this won't happen on future transactions. But in considering this complaint I have to assess whether BoS did anything wrong and to the extent it didn't provide the service it should have what it needs to do to put this right.

Ms M wanted to make an international transaction to pay for a car. The transaction was for a large amount and to a new payee. It triggered BoS's fraud alert system and the payment was stopped for additional checks. I understand this was inconvenient, but banks are required to have fraud detection systems in place, and these are for the benefit of their customers. Ms M received a notification that her account had been suspended and she should call a number. I note the comment Ms M has made about the number being incorrect, but she was then put through to the fraud team. I appreciate she was on the call for 15 minutes and had to answer several questions but as the transaction had been flagged for further checks I do not find that BoS did anything wrong by carrying out the required process to ensure the transaction was genuine. Therefore, I do not find that I can say BoS did anything wrong when it initially stopped the transaction for further checks.

However, after successfully completing the checks Ms M was told she could continue with the transaction, but this was blocked on two further occasions. I understand that Ms M wants to know the reasons why the transaction was blocked on these occasions but as the security and fraud systems are commercially sensitive, I do not require specific details to be provided. I also cannot tell BoS how to operate its security systems or tell it to make changes. That said, I think that BoS should take note of the situation with Ms M's experience as in this case its systems prevented her from making a payment on multiple occasions and as it couldn't guarantee this wouldn't keep on happening Ms M had to move her money to another account to make the payment.

Given the above, I don't find that Ms M was provided with the service she should have been. I accept that the first call was reasonable given the initial transaction triggered the fraud alert, but she then had to make further calls after she had passed the security questions and had been told she could continue with her transaction. Ms M incurred costs because of the additional calls and was caused distress and inconvenience by having to make further failed transaction attempts before finally making the payment from another account. BoS initially offered Ms M £45 to cover the cost of her second call and £50 for the inconvenience she was caused. It then offered a further £45 for the call costs and a further £30 for the inconvenience. I understand that Ms M's main concern is not the money, but the action taken to prevent this issue arising again, but in this case, I find the compensation offered by BoS is reasonable.

In regard to the risk of a future transaction being blocked, BoS cannot guarantee this won't happen again and this isn't something I would expect it to be able to do. I understand why this is a concern to Ms M and I appreciate that she feels her complaint wasn't resolved as she took action to complete the transaction through a different account. But as BoS has offered compensation to cover Ms M's costs and the inconvenience she was caused I find this a reasonable resolution.

My final decision

My final decision is that Bank of Scotland plc isn't required to do anything further in resolution of this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms M to accept or

reject my decision before 15 November 2023.

Jane Archer
Ombudsman