

## **The complaint**

Mr E is unhappy that Barclays Bank UK PLC blocked his account and that they won't admit that they called him on an unregistered number.

## **What happened**

On 27 July 2023, Mr E updated the phone number he had registered with Barclays, changing it from a number that ended with a four (the old number) to a number that ended with a seven (the new number). The next day, on 28 July 2023, Mr E attempted to make a payment from his Barclays account using his mobile phone app on his old mobile number – the number that ended with a four. This attempted transaction was flagged by Barclays automated fraud prevention systems because Mr E had updated his phone number from that old number the day before, and Mr E's account was restricted by Barclays as a result.

Mr E called Barclays about his account being blocked and he was asked to visit a Barclays branch with two forms of personal ID. Mr E visited a Barclays branch with his ID several weeks later, on 29 August 2023, and the block on his account was then removed. Mr E wasn't happy that Barclays had blocked his account, and he also wasn't happy that Barclays had called him after the block had been applied on an unregistered phone number and then later denied that they had ever made that call. So, he raised a complaint.

Barclays responded to Mr E and said that they didn't feel they'd done anything wrong by flagging the attempted transaction made using the old telephone number. And they also explained that they hadn't made any calls to Mr E following the block, which meant that any call Mr E might have received from an unrestricted number hadn't been from them. Mr E wasn't satisfied with Barclays' response, so he referred his complaint to this service.

One of our investigators looked at this complaint. But they didn't feel Barclays had acted unfairly in blocking the payment and found Barclays explanation that they hadn't made any call to Mr E to be persuasive. Mr E remained dissatisfied, so the matter was escalated to an ombudsman for a final 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.

Fraud prevention systems are used by all financial institutions to flag account activity that may be of concern and to prevent further usage of an account where it's felt that there is a possibility that fraud may be potentially occurring. Indeed, it must be noted that financial institutions, such as Barclays, have an obligation to employ such systems in order to comply with banking regulations which require banks to have systems in place to protect their customers' accounts, as much as possible, from acts of attempted fraud.

Additionally, it's incumbent on banks to employ these systems with a degree of vigilance – to err on the side of caution, as it were – which unfortunately means that there will be instances

where legitimately authorised transfers are flagged erroneously by the fraud prevention systems. And this appears to have been what happened in this instance.

Mr E has confirmed he did try to instruct the payment that was flagged by Barclays as being suspicious. But given that Mr E attempted to make that payment using his mobile banking app on a telephone number he had removed from Barclays systems the day before, it seems reasonable to me that Barclays would consider that instruction to be suspicious.

Accordingly, I don't feel that Barclays did anything wrong or unfair by blocking the payment or by then requiring Mr E to come into branch to satisfy their identity verification process. Indeed, having updated his telephone number with Barclays, I feel it was then incumbent on Mr E to ensure that if he did need to access his Barclays account using his mobile phone, that he did so using his updated number.

Mr E is also unhappy that Barclays called him on an unregistered phone number following the blocking of his account. But Barclays have explained that they have no record of making any calls to Mr E. And Barclays also explain that a call couldn't have been made by them to Mr E because one of their fraud prevention measures is that they will only contact an account holder on an updated telephone number after that number has been present on their systems for at least one month.

Mr E has said he spoke with a member of Barclays fraud team who told him that Barclays had called him on an unregistered number. But Barclays have no call notes that corroborate Mr E's claim. And I find Barclays explanation as to why their own policies wouldn't have allowed such a call to have been made to Mr E's new number to be persuasive.

All of which means that I don't feel that Barclays have acted unfairly here as Mr E contends. And it follows from this that I won't be upholding this complaint or instructing Barclays to take any further action. I realise this won't be the outcome Mr E was wanting. But I hope he'll understand given what I've explained, why I've made the final decision that I have.

### **My final decision**

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr E to accept or reject my decision before 6 March 2024.

Paul Cooper  
**Ombudsman**