

The complaint

A company I will refer to as S complains about the service provided by Barclays Bank UK PLC in relation to international bank transfers.

What happened

The following is intended only as a brief summary of events. S holds a business account with Barclays. In April 2022, it attempted to pay a supplier via a transfer in US dollars. As the supplier was based in Ukraine, the transfer was initially declined by Barclays. S provided further information to allay Barclays' concerns, and the transfer was attempted again in May 2022.

Barclays processed this payment, but it was stopped by a third-party intermediary that I will refer to as N. N had concerns over the transfer. The funds were returned to S in August 2022. A third attempt to make the payment in USD was then attempted in late August 2022.

S has said that it requested this payment be routed in a different way to avoid N. However, it seems that the routing did still involve N. And N requested further information from S. Ultimately, this transfer was also cancelled. And the funds were returned to S in November 2022. S was then able to make the transfer, in Euros.

S was unhappy with the service Barclays, had provided, that it had routed the third attempt via N, and that it had not advised S to make the transfer via a different currency. S said that it had a lost substantial amount of money and suffered reputational damage.

Barclays considered the complaint but said that, as the issues were outside of its control, it did not feel it was responsible. And that Barclays had done all it reasonably could to support the completion of the payments. It did offer S £200 for later customer service issues relating to complaint handling.

S remained unhappy and brought its complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service. But our Investigator did not think Barclays was responsible for the issues S had experienced. As S was not satisfied, its complaint has been passed to me for 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.

Having done so, I am not upholding this complaint. I'll explain why.

It is clear that S experienced a great deal of difficulty with making the transfer it wanted to. However, my role is to consider whether Barclays unreasonably caused any of these difficulties.

Given the payment was being made to Ukraine during a time of war, it is not unexpected that

there would be some difficulty in completing this transfer. International sanctions and Barclays own risk appetite, mean that some further checks were necessary. I don't consider this to be unreasonable. After these had been completed, Barclays was willing to process the transfer and it did so.

However, from the time the funds leave Barclays, it has very limited control over what happens to them. Checks by a third party are not something Barclays can be held responsible for.

I note that S had requested that the third attempt at the transfer be made via an alternate route. However, it seems that N was actually a party instructed to act for S's supplier's bank when dealing with USD transactions. As such, avoiding N when making this transaction in USD would not have been possible.

S has said that Barclays should have advised it to make the transfer via a different currency. However, whilst I appreciate this may have avoided the issues experienced, Barclays' role here was to execute the instructions S gave it. The instructions were to make the payment in USD and Barclays did this.

Barclays also seems to have done all it could to help move the process along, passing on N's requests for further information and then relaying this back to N once received from S.

Ultimately, whilst I appreciate S's frustrations over the situation and that this outcome is not the one it or its director is hoping for, I am unable to fairly and reasonably say that Barclays should have done anything more in the circumstances.

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 S to accept or reject my decision before 1 December 2023.

Sam Thomas
Ombudsman