

The complaint

Mr S complains that British Gas Services Limited failed to carry out an annual service and cancelled his homeware cover without warning. It also failed to install a new thermostat system as agreed.

What happened

Mr S said British Gas didn't do the annual service on his central heating. It was also supposed to install a smart thermostat at the same time. But it cancelled his cover. Mr S said he's received a very poor service from British Gas. He didn't want the £100 goodwill cheque. He wanted British Gas to honour its commitment to carry out the service and install the smart thermostat.

British Gas apologised that the service Mr S had received wasn't to the standard he was expecting. It could see Mr S had been advised to add the installation as part of the upcoming annual boiler service. But Mr S had purchased the thermostat from the manufacturer with self-installation.

It could see Mr S had made a number of calls to try and confirm what would happen. And he'd been incorrectly told the installation would be added to the boiler service and wouldn't be chargeable. When the engineer arrived to carry out the service he explained the smart package didn't include installation. British Gas said the engineer was correct and it was sorry Mr S had previously been given the wrong information.

British Gas said the engineer hadn't completed the service as Mr S had phoned to query the installation and said he was going to cancel the policy. Mr S was then given further incorrect information. But British Gas could now confirm it'd added central heating cover back on his policy. And it would like to arrange the first service. British Gas apologised for the time spent and stress caused to Mr S. And it offered £100 as a gesture of goodwill.

Mr S wasn't satisfied with British Gas' response. So he contacted our service and our investigator looked into the matter. She explained British Gas weren't fitting thermostats at that time. And that was why Mr S hadn't been able to buy it (for a higher price) with installation included.

Although Mr S had been told British Gas could carry out the installation it wasn't part of the terms of his policy. So she couldn't say British Gas had done anything wrong in relation to the installation.

But our investigator agreed Mr S had received a poor service from British Gas. He was told on two occasions the thermostat could be fitted during the service. And that wasn't correct. When the engineer came to service the boiler he shouldn't have left before completing the work – even if he'd heard Mr S discussing cancelling the policy. And Mr S received further poor service while it was being sorted out.

Our investigator looked at everything that'd happened. And she thought British Gas's offer of £100 compensation was fair in the circumstances. So she wouldn't be asking for a higher amount.

Mr S didn't agree. It'd been verbally agreed that the installation would be carried out as part of the annual service. And when he purchased the thermostat a second time he couldn't buy it with installation included due to a shortage of engineers. But British Gas had advertised a free installation service. So he's asked for an ombudsman's 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.

I can understand Mr S's frustration. He had the smart thermostat system at his previous address. And when he arranged for work to be carried out at his new property it was suggested he might be able to have it installed at the same time as his first annual service.

Mr S purchased the thermostat online directly from the manufacturer without the additional installation cost included in the purchase price. Our investigator has explained that our service can't look at the options Mr S was offered when he purchased the smart thermostat as that isn't a regulated activity.

So I can't comment on what types of packages were available to Mr S when he tried to purchase the product. But I can look at the service Mr S received when he arranged an annual service as part of his homecare policy.

It's clear Mr S was given the wrong information when he asked British Gas about carrying out the installation for him. He wanted to arrange an annual service through his homecare policy. And he was wrongly told the engineer would also be able to install the thermostat at the same time.

Mr S should've been told British Gas weren't carrying out that sort of installation at the time due to the covid situation. That was why customers weren't able to purchase the thermostat with an included installation package.

Mr S hadn't paid extra for installation and it wasn't included as part of the service provided by his homecare policy. So when the engineer arrived to carry out the boiler service it's understandable why they said they couldn't fit the thermostat as well. It wasn't part of the work schedule and there was no agreement in place between the thermostat manufacturer and British Gas to cover the cost of installation.

I do appreciate Mr S was expecting the engineer to install the thermostat. He'd confirmed with British Gas by telephone it would do so. But British Gas' staff had made a mistake. It wasn't possible to do so. And British Gas has apologised for giving Mr S the wrong impression.

Mr S was understandably upset to discover the engineer wouldn't be carrying out the installation. And he contacted British Gas to find out what had gone wrong. It seems British Gas further compounded its mistake – and Mr S's upset – when the engineer left without completing the service, thinking Mr S wanted to cancel the policy.

That shouldn't have happened. I can understand if Mr S was becoming frustrated by what was happening. But the engineer could've checked what to do before deciding to leave. He still had a service to complete and Mr S still had a policy in place.

British Gas then cancelled Mr S's policy because the engineer thought that was what he wanted. But it should've contacted Mr S first and tried to find out what had gone wrong. And I understand it has now reinstated Mr S's cover for his central heating system and apologised again for its mistakes.

I know Mr S feels he had a verbal agreement that British Gas would fit the thermostat during his service. But he'd purchased a package that didn't include any fitting cost. And I can't hold British Gas responsible for the options offered by a different company when Mr S bought the thermostat.

There was clearly some confusion when Mr S spoke to British Gas and he shouldn't have been told the installation could go ahead. It wasn't possible as I've explained above. And British Gas has apologised for giving Mr S the wrong information.

Mr S would like British Gas to simply honour its original promise to install the thermostat. He says it was even advertising free installation deals, although it wasn't possible to select them. But I understand the ongoing situation is causing long delays for certain types of work and British Gas can only offer normal boiler services within a short timeframe at present.

I don't underestimate how distressing Mr S has found this. He received incorrect information from British Gas on more than one occasion. And it must've been very upsetting when the engineer arrived and left without completing either task.

I understand British Gas is now trying to arrange an installation at the same time as the service appointment if it's possible to do so. And I hope Mr S will soon be able to have both a boiler service and updated system in the near future.

The role of this service isn't to punish businesses for their mistakes. We award what we feel is fair and reasonable. On this occasion I can see British Gas has offered Mr S £100 compensation for his trouble and upset. And its apologised for the poor service he received on a number of occasions. I think that's the right outcome in the circumstances. And I won't be asking British Gas to do anything more.

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 S to accept or reject my decision before 28 May 2021.

Andrew Mason
Ombudsman