

The complaint

Mr C complains Metro Bank PLC told him he was having problems receiving one-time passcodes (an “OTP”) because of his mobile’s signal when that wasn’t the case. He also complains he spent a lot of time speaking to Metro PLC before the problem was resolved.

What happened

Mr C opened an account with Metro Bank and downloaded Metro Bank’s mobile banking app. Shortly afterwards, he stopped receiving OTPs meaning he couldn’t use Metro Bank’s mobile banking app. He called Metro Bank twice about this – spending over an hour on the phone – to try and get the problems resolved. Following an investigation by its IT department, Metro Bank wrote back to Mr C to say that he’d not been receiving OTPs because his mobile phone hadn’t been connected to the network at the time. In other words, Metro Bank said the problems he was having were down to his mobile phone’s network signal rather than anything at its end.

Mr C was unhappy with Metro Bank’s response, saying that the members of staff he’d spoken to heard him receiving SMSs whilst he was on the phone to them – so it wasn’t true that he was having problems with his network. He was also unhappy that Metro Bank’s response didn’t say that it had managed to resolve his issues – the problems he was having receiving OTPs stopped shortly after he complained. Finally, he was unhappy that Metro Bank didn’t call him back when it said it would do so.

Metro Bank investigated further and offered Mr C £5 in compensation for not calling back when it said it would. Mr C suggested £10 compensation would be more appropriate. Metro Bank agreed to increase its offer and Mr C accepted compensation for that part of his complaint. He then complained to us about the rest of Metro Bank’s response.

One of our investigators looked into Mr C’s complaint and said that they didn’t think Metro Bank had acted fairly. They said that it was clear Mr C hadn’t received the OTPs when Metro Bank had sent them – and that he’d only received them after a considerable delay by which point they were no longer of use. They said that this was an issue for Metro Bank, and that they ought to offer Mr C an alternative way of authenticating that didn’t rely on a mobile phone and pay him £50 in compensation to reflect the inconvenience he’d been caused.

Mr C was happy with our investigator’s recommendations. Metro Bank wasn’t – it said that it had shown it had sent OTPs to Mr C and that it couldn’t be responsible if something went wrong after that. Our investigator disagreed, so Metro Bank asked for an ombudsman to look into this complaint. That’s what I’ve done.

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.

Mr C started having problems with his Metro Bank account shortly after he opened it. He stopped receiving OTPs meaning he couldn’t log into his account or make payments using

Metro Bank's mobile banking app. He spoke to two members of staff at Metro Bank – who he's said provided excellent service – for around an hour about this. He checked his mobile was working whilst doing so by getting a third party to send him several SMSs. Everyone appears to accept that the SMSs the third party sent can be heard arriving during the calls. The second member of staff recommended Metro Bank's IT department investigate further.

Metro Bank's IT department investigated and said that the OTPs were being sent out correctly but weren't being received until much later – and that they'd all been received in a short space of time. Metro Bank's IT department concluded, based on this, that Mr C's mobile phone hadn't been connected to the network at the time. I don't think that was an unreasonable conclusion. Equally, I agree with Mr C that the fact that he was able to receive SMSs from a third party whilst he was on the phone to Metro Bank suggests otherwise. I can, therefore, understand why he was unhappy with Metro Bank's response as he didn't believe the problems were to do with his network signal.

Metro Bank fixed the problems Mr C was having receiving OTPs shortly after he complained. Metro Bank didn't, however, let Mr C know that it had done so when it replied to his complaint. He found out shortly afterwards. I might have expected Metro Bank to have questioned whether or not its IT department had got to the bottom of the problem had Metro Bank not already fixed the problems Mr C was having. But I wouldn't necessarily expect Metro Bank to do so once it had fixed the problem. In the circumstances, the only thing I think Metro Bank did wrong in this case was not letting Mr C know sooner that it had resolved the problem. That meant he was more frustrated that he needed to be.

Putting things right

Our investigator recommended that Metro Bank pay Mr C an additional £50 in compensation for the distress and inconvenience he was caused – albeit for different reasons. I don't think that this is an unfair outcome, and I do think that Metro Bank could have handled this issue better. So that's the award I'm going to make, albeit for different reasons.

My final decision

My final decision is that I require Metro Bank PLC to pay Mr C £50 in compensation in full and final settlement of his complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr C to accept or reject my decision before 6 May 2022.

Nicolas Atkinson
Ombudsman