

The complaint

Mr S complains about the service he received from National Westminster Bank Plc (NatWest) when trying to access his online banking using their facial recognition software.

What happened

Mr S holds a bank account with NatWest. In April 2022 he attempted to make a payment using biometric facial recognition software within NatWest's online banking platform. However, the software failed to recognise Mr S's face, and as a result it took a number of hours for him to have his payment processed, and for the software to be removed from his phone. So, Mr S complained.

NatWest considered Mr S's complaint, and accepted there were shortcomings in the service provided, for which they apologised. They explained they'd since processed Mr S's payment, and had requested the facial recognition feature be removed from his digital banking services. They also explained how Mr S could remove this himself, albeit I understand Mr S faced further difficulty with this.

NatWest agreed to pay Mr S £50 by way of an apology for the shortfall in the service provided. But Mr S felt this was insufficient, so he referred his complaint to our service.

An investigator considered the matter and was satisfied the difficulties Mr S experienced were as a result of failings with NatWest's systems, for which he felt Mr S should be compensated. But he said that as NatWest had since removed the software, apologised, and offered Mr S £50 by way of compensation, in the circumstances, he felt this was fair.

But Mr S remained unhappy and said the compensation didn't accurately reflect the time spent dealing with the matter. So, the complaint has now been passed to me to decide.

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.

The fact that Mr S was put to some inconvenience is not in dispute. NatWest already agree that they were at fault in this matter. And for the avoidance of doubt, I'm satisfied that the inconvenience Mr S experienced was as a result of a system failing for which NatWest are responsible.

But just because a customer experiences inconvenience, this doesn't always mean that compensation is due. And in some instances, we might deem that fixing the issue along with an apology is sufficient, dependant on the circumstances.

In this case however, it does seem Mr S did experience a reasonable level of inconvenience, given that he's told us he spent around three hours trying to arrange for both the payment to be sent, and for the facial recognition service to be removed from his banking software to prevent any future problems. So, I'm satisfied that some compensation is due.

But while Mr S was put to some inconvenience, it does seem that the issues he experienced were resolved on the same day they occurred. And not only was the payment sent that day, action was also taken to arrange for the recognition software to be removed from his digital banking services at the same time.

I appreciate Mr S values his time at more than around £16 per hour, but it's important to recognise that customers may face issues at times with financial service providers. And when problems occur, we look to ensure that the business, where possible, put things right both quickly, and effectively – which I'm satisfied they have in this case. And generally speaking, any award of compensation wouldn't usually look to reimburse a customer based on an hourly rate for their time.

So, while I accept this will be disappointing for Mr S, I'm satisfied NatWest have now dealt with the underlying issue, and have made a fair offer of compensation for the inconvenience Mr S was put to. So, NatWest should proceed with making this payment to Mr S if they haven't already.

My final decision

National Westminster Bank Plc have already made an offer to pay Mr S £50 in compensation to settle the complaint, and I think this offer is fair in all the circumstances.

So, my decision is that I uphold this complaint and direct National Westminster Bank Plc to pay Mr S £50 if it hasn't already.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 23 December 2022.

Brad McIlquham
Ombudsman