

The complaint

Ms R and Mr S complains Santander UK plc (Santander) provided poor service when trying to open a joint bank account.

What happened

Ms R says she visited a local branch of Santander in May 2022, to open a joint bank account for her and her partner who was an existing bank account customer. This bank account was required as they'd recently taken out a joint mortgage with Santander. Ms R says when she visited the branch she was told she needed to apply for the account online, despite the fact Santander's website says bank accounts can be opened in branch. Ms R says she was pregnant at the time and had to take time off work and this was very inconvenient. Ms R says she then applied online and received her new account details and debit cards but was subsequently told the account had been blocked.

Ms R says it took until late June 2022 before the joint account was finally operational, having made numerous lengthy phone calls and she still hasn't been informed why her account was blocked and it took too long for Santander to resolve the issue.

Ms R says while Santander have paid £100 by way of apology this doesn't go far enough to cover her time and the trouble and upset she and her partner experienced.

Santander apologised for the fact Ms R wasn't able to open the account when she visited the branch in May 2022, but this was because of staff shortages on that day. Santander have acknowledged there were service issues but says sometimes restrictions need to be placed on bank accounts whilst it undertakes additional checks, and there's no specific timescales to deal with these situations. Santander says due to an error on their part, the account profiles weren't properly linked but this has been corrected and the block has now been removed and the joint account is now fully operational.

Santander have apologised for the issues Ms R and Mr S faced and paid £100 for the trouble and upset caused.

Ms R and Mr S weren't happy with Santander's response and referred the matter to this service.

The investigator looked at all the available information and upheld the complaint. The investigator felt Ms R's and Mr S's customer journey was less than satisfactory and Santander could have done more to keep Ms R and Mr S informed of what was happening during the process. The investigator accepted Ms R had spent a good deal of time on this and it would have been frustrating for her and asked Santander to pay an additional £100, taking the compensation to a total of £200.

Ms R and Mr S didn't feel the compensation was sufficient and asked for the matter to be referred 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.

Having done so, I will also be upholding this complaint and I will explain how I have come to my decision.

I can understand it would have been upsetting and frustrating for Ms R and Mr S for Santander to take as long as it did to finally open their joint bank account.

When looking at this complaint as Santander have accepted it provided poor customer service I will consider if the amount of compensation it has paid, and the additional level of redress suggested by the investigator goes far enough here.

Ms R's and Mr S's complaint centres around the issues they faced when opening a joint bank account with Santander. Ms R has also raised issues following the lodging of her complaint to Santander but it's not the role of this service to scrutinise Santander's complaints process or to tell Santander how it should deal with complaint more widely.

The first thing to say here is Santander have accepted it made some errors on opening the joint bank account, specifically relating to the account profiles not being correctly linked and has apologised for that. Santander have explained to this service the reason Ms R wasn't able to open the joint account when she visited, was due to staffing issues and not a policy to only open bank accounts online. While it's not possible for me to know what was actually said when Ms R visited the branch in May 2022, she went away believing that was the only option available to her.

Santander have explained there are times when it needs to restrict accounts when undertaking further checks and there's no time scales for that. While I understand this point that doesn't excuse the fact the delays seem to be more of a result of internal errors when linking the account profiles and the account opening process could have been a lot smoother. It's also fair to say given the number of phone calls Ms R made during this time, Santander could have picked up on the problem more quickly than it did.

Ms R feels the compensation isn't sufficient and it should be linked to her hourly pay rate, but that's not something this service would consider, more that it looks at the individual circumstances of the complaint. While Ms R may not agree, it's not my role to penalise businesses when service errors like this occur.

What I would expect is Santander to apologise for its mistake and put matters right and I'm satisfied it has done that here, however, like the investigator I feel a more appropriate level of redress should be £200, not the £100 Santander initially offered.

While Ms R and Mr S will be disappointed with my decision, I am satisfied this is a fair outcome here.

Putting things right

I instruct Santander UK plc to pay Ms R and Mr S an additional £100 for the trouble and upset caused, taking the total redress to £200.

My final decision

My final decision is that I uphold this complaint.

I instruct Santander UK plc to pay Ms R and Mr S an additional £100 for the trouble and upset caused, taking the total redress to £200.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms R and Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 26 April 2023.

Barry White
Ombudsman