

The complaint

Mrs S complains that TransUnion International UK Limited (TransUnion) shared personal information from her credit file with a third party.

What happened

Mrs S complained to TransUnion on 13 February 2023, after receiving a message from her sister informing her that their credit files had been merged. This resulted in Mrs S' sister having sight of her borrowing, something she wouldn't have wanted her to know about.

In its final response, dated 22 March 2023, TransUnion apologised for the error and confirmed its database had been corrected. It offered to consider any financial loss Mrs S had suffered as a result of the error, on receipt of supporting evidence.

Mrs S didn't think an apology was enough and so brought her complaint to this service. She said this was a data breach, which has left her feeling vulnerable to fraud and untrusting of TransUnion's ability to keep her personal data safe. She also said the issue has had a huge impact on her mental health and left her feeling extremely anxious.

Following referral to this service, TransUnion offered to pay Mrs S £250 compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused. Mrs S declined this offer as she didn't feel it went far enough to address the severity of the error, and the emotional stress and embarrassment it caused.

Our investigator reviewed matters and concluded that TransUnion was at fault for the disclosure of Mrs S' personal information and compensation was warranted. But, as Mrs S had confirmed there was no further detriment or impact (other than that already mentioned by Mrs S), and TransUnion had resolved the matter within a reasonable timeframe, the investigator thought the offer of £250 fairly reflected the impact caused.

Mrs S disagreed and said the situation had caused her immense reputational damage.

As no agreement has been reached, the matter has 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.

In considering what is fair and reasonable, I've taken into account the relevant industry rules and guidance, and what would be considered as good industry practice.

It's unclear from the evidence available what happened to cause the merging of the two credit files. But I'm satisfied an error of some kind occurred and that TransUnion have taken responsibility for the error, so I don't need to decide that aspect – I just need to consider whether its offer is fair.

As this service is not the regulator, I cannot fine or punish TransUnion for the mistake it made. But I can consider the impact the error caused Mrs S, and this is what I've thought about.

The files were separated on 17 March 2023, which I believe to be within a reasonable timeframe from when TransUnion were notified of the merge.

I understand Mrs S feels strongly about how she should be compensated and has worries about what could happen in the future. But I can only consider what has already happened.

I haven't seen any evidence to support the error has resulted in financial loss. Neither am I persuaded that Mrs S has been left at risk of identity theft by an unknown third party. I say this because the information was shared with a family member, who was more than likely already aware of much of Mrs S' personal data such as her full name, address, date of birth etc.

I accept that Mrs S' credit file being shared would've caused her distress and concern about the safety of her personal data. And I don't doubt the stress and embarrassment she reported feeling when she found out her sister had sight of her borrowing and financial standing. So, I do agree a compensation award should be paid to Mrs S in recognition of this. But I'm satisfied that the offer of £250 is in line with the level of distress Mrs S has suffered and within our award ranges for situations such as this.

Mrs S has confirmed that nothing further has happened since the separation of the two credit files. So, in the absence of any evidence of financial loss or detriment, I can't agree that TransUnion should increase the compensation from £250 to a higher amount.

Putting things right

TransUnion should now pay Mrs S £250 compensation.

My final decision

For the reasons set out above, my final decision is that I uphold Mrs S' complaint about TransUnion International UK Limited. I now require it to put things right as described above.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs S to accept or reject my decision before 11 December 2023.

Nicola Bastin
Ombudsman