

The complaint

Mr B complains that Barclays Bank UK PLC failed to release his funds after its decision to close his account.

What happened

In February 2022, Barclays wrote to Mr B, who lives abroad, giving notice it intended to close his accounts in line with its policy concerning accounts held in the European Economic Area (EEA). Mr B completed an account closure form and posted this back to Barclays, but Barclays said this form was never received. Mr B said that he emailed the form as well. As no closure instruction was received, Barclays closed Mr B's accounts, but did not move Mr B's funds.

Barclays told Mr B he'd need to follow the EEA reclaims process to reclaim the money in his account. This required Mr B to submit a reclaim form with certified ID and address verification documents. Barclays received the form from Mr B in December 2022, however, Barclays requested certified copies of Mr B's ID and proof of address dated within the last three months before it would release his funds. Barclays eventually received a certified copy of Mr B's passport, but not the certified proof of address. Mr B said this was difficult to provide and he'd only do so if Barclays would cover the cost. Barclays said the costs incurred would be Mr B's responsibility.

Barclays then agreed to escalate the matter to a specialist team who could call Mr B to complete his claim as an exception to the process, which would remove Mr B's objection to paying for address verification. Mr B supplied a preferred contact number to be called, but despite several attempts, Barclays' staff were unsuccessful in reaching him.

Mr B was dissatisfied with Barclays' handling of his complaint and referred his complaint to our service. Our investigator didn't recommend that the complaint be upheld as he hadn't found any errors by Barclays, and it had tried to help Mr B. Mr B remained unhappy and requested an ombudsman review his complaint.

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 have looked carefully at all the information Barclays have provided to see if it has acted within its terms and conditions, followed due process, and to see if it treated Mr B fairly. I was sorry to learn that what should have been a straightforward process has turned into a prolonged and drawn-out experience for Mr B. Part of my role is to determine whether what took place treated Mr B reasonably and whether Barclays followed the process correctly.

From the information I have seen, Barclays in common with other UK banks have a process to follow regarding the release of account funds. And so having closed Mr B's account, along with others held by customers living in EEA countries, Barclays required customers to provide the information set out on its website and communicated to Mr B.

Mr B was unwilling to provide his proof of address information as required by Barclays without Barclays agreement to meet the cost. I don't think Barclays had to do this as the responsibility to verify personal details is with the customer. However, Barclays did attempt a work around and it's unfortunate that this didn't work. Perhaps Mr B could give Barclays a date and time to call again, and this might break through the problem.

In conclusion, I think Barclays' account closure process was fair and reasonable and appears to have been followed correctly. That Barclays made an exception to that process - arranging a call from a specialist team - shows their attempt to make adjustments to assist Mr B to bring this to a conclusion.

From the lack of identifiable errors and the actions Barclays took to assist Mr B, I think Barclays has acted within its terms and conditions and treated Mr B fairly. And so I cannot require it to take any further action towards him.

My final decision

For the reasons I have given it is my final decision that the complaint is not upheld.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B to accept or reject my decision before 15 April 2024.

Chris Blamires
Ombudsman