

The complaint

Miss W complains that Barclays Bank UK PLC closed her accounts without notice.

What happened

Miss W – who lives abroad, held a current and savings account with Barclays. While the current account was held in joint names with her sister, the savings account was in her sole name. Both accounts held significant balances. And the current account was mainly used for receipt of Miss W's pension payments from the UK.

In December 2021 Barclays decided to close Miss W's accounts. The accounts were closed in February 2022. Miss W says that she wasn't aware of Barclays intentions until March 2022. She called Barclays to find out what had happened to her account balances. But the call didn't result in Miss W being able to access her money.

Miss W complained to Barclays in April 2022. But by 6 June 2022, Barclays had not been able to respond in full to her complaint, so it issued a letter providing referral rights to this service. A full response was issued on 20 July 2022.

Barclays said it wrote to Miss W in December 2021 to give her 62 days' notice of its intention to close her accounts. And this gave her sufficient time to transfer her money elsewhere and make new arrangements for her pension payments. It acknowledged the length of time it had taken to respond to Miss W's complaint, and it offered her £100 compensation.

But, by this time, Miss W had travelled to the UK and her account balances had been released to her on 14 July 2022. Miss W referred her complaint to this service. She said that as she hadn't been notified of the account closure in time, she travelled to the UK to access her money and that she'd had problems with her pension payments. She thought Barclays should compensate her for the cost of her flights and the distress and inconvenience.

Barclays has since accepted that the account closure notice it intended to send Miss W wasn't generated by its system. Our investigator initially recommended that Barclays pay Miss W £1,000 compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused. Barclays agreed to this, but Miss W didn't. And she supplied evidence of the costs incurred in having to travel to the UK to resolve the matter.

On receipt of the evidence, the investigator recommended that Barclays should pay £3,000 to put things right for Miss W. Barclays didn't agree. It said Miss W didn't need to travel to the UK to resolve the problem. Our investigator listened to recordings of the calls Miss W had with Barclays. Having done so, she noted that Barclays had told Miss W that she would need to obtain the balance of the account in her sole name herself. And that she didn't think Barclays had explained to Miss W what alternatives were available for her to access her money. And she maintained that she thought Barclays should pay Miss W £3,000.

Barclays didn't agree, it accepted that it could have been more forthcoming with information on alternatives for Miss W to access her money but maintained that Miss W hadn't been told she needed to travel to the UK. Barclays also questioned whether accessing her money was

the sole reason for Miss W's visit to the UK. It said that prior to the pandemic Miss W had visited the UK regularly.

As agreement wasn't reached, the complaint 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.

Having done so, I've come to the same overall conclusions as the investigator. I'll explain why.

Miss W hasn't complained about Barclays' decision to close her accounts – so I make no findings on this. Rather her complaint is that the accounts were closed before she'd received the notification from Barclays and the consequences of that.

It's no longer in dispute that Barclays failed to issue the notice of closure letter to Miss W and, as a result, Miss W was caused distress and inconvenience. What is in dispute is whether Miss W needed to travel to the UK to access her funds resulting in the travel expenses she incurred. I've thought about this carefully.

I've listened to the call recordings Barclays has provided and, like the investigator, I've found Miss W was told that as one account was held in joint names, her sister who lived in the UK would be able to obtain the funds from that account. But I'm satisfied Miss W was also told she would need to obtain the funds in her sole account herself. And while Miss W wasn't directly told she would need to return to the UK, when she expressed concerns about the possibility of having to do so, I'm satisfied that Barclays didn't offer any alternative solutions to enable Miss W to access her money. So, I'm persuaded it wasn't unreasonable for Miss W to think that returning to the UK was her only option.

I acknowledge Barclays' comments that prior to the pandemic Miss W was a regular visitor to the UK. And I can see it has questioned whether the sole reason for Miss W's visit to the UK was to withdraw her account balances. And I note that Miss W did say in one of the calls that pre the pandemic she had visited the UK regularly. But I'm satisfied that Miss W also made it clear that she hadn't returned to the UK since the pandemic and that she had concerns about doing so.

Overall, I haven't seen anything to persuade me that Miss W had planned to travel to the UK in 2022. The evidence Miss W has provided about her travel arrangements suggest her trip was booked not long after Barclays' letter dated 6 June 2022. So, I'm persuaded that Miss W's decision to travel to the UK was made because of her concerns about obtaining the money in her accounts. So, I think it's fair that Barclays cover the travel costs Miss W has incurred and the distress and inconvenience caused.

Putting things right

Miss W has provided evidence showing the flight costs were £2,300. She has also provided evidence of the problems she has encountered with her pension providers in obtaining the payments that were made to the account after it was closed. I have no reason to dispute what Miss W has provided, so I find that a compensation payment of £3,000 fairly recognises Miss W's financial loss and the distress and inconvenience caused.

My final decision

For the reasons given above, I uphold this complaint.

Barclays Bank UK PLC should pay Miss W £3,000 in full and final settlement of this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss W to accept or reject my decision before 3 December 2023.

Sandra Greene
Ombudsman