

The complaint

Mr M complains that National Westminster Bank Plc (NatWest) made mistakes with the process of switching his account from another financial business causing inconvenience.

What happened

In March 2023 Mr M visited a local branch and spoke to the branch staff about switching his account from another financial business. As part of the account switching process Mr M thought he would be eligible for a £200 switching incentive.

But the account switch took longer than Mr M was expecting, and he had to visit his branch and make various calls to try and resolve the issues. He even made a further application to switch the account. In the end the switch was terminated, Mr M says he was told he needed to have £1300 in his existing account before the account switch could take place. Mr M wasn't happy and felt this should have been explained to him sooner.

Mr M complained to NatWest, but it didn't uphold his complaint. It said the account switch had been terminated by the other financial business, so it wasn't responsible for the delays. NatWest also said the £200 account switch benefit was only available for customers that applied online or via the mobile banking app. Mr M remained unhappy so referred the complaint to our service.

NatWest reconsidered the complaint and responded to our service. It said that the applications were completed in branch, so Mr M wasn't eligible for the online switcher campaign benefit of £200 even if the account had been opened.

It did accept that things didn't happen as they should have as part of the account switch. NatWest explained that the other financial business had contacted it as part of the account switching process to highlight that previously it felt Mr M had been victim of a scam and so it wanted to ensure he didn't fall victim to another scam. NatWest say this was normal process in account switches, but NatWest told us it should then have contacted Mr M to discuss the account switch. This did not happen on either of the two occasions Mr M tried to switch the account in March 2023. Mr M was also not informed of the correct reasons as to why the account hadn't been opened.

NatWest said it was prepared to offer Mr M the £200 account switch benefit that he believed he would receive when he applied for the account switch, and it also offered an additional £50 for the trouble and upset cause to him.

Our investigator considered the complaint and agreed NatWest should have provided clearer information to Mr M when he applied for the account switch, and he also felt it didn't follow its own process correctly. As a result, Mr M had to visit the branch and make calls to NatWest.

He felt that NatWest's offer of £200 for the account switch incentive and £50 for the inconvenience caused was fair. He explained that Mr M wouldn't have been eligible for the £200 incentive even if it had gone through correctly as he had applied for the account switch in branch and not online or through the mobile banking app. He also felt the £50 offered

fairly reflected the inconvenience caused to Mr M for having to chase the account switch with NatWest.

Mr M didn't agree and asked for an ombudsman to review the complaint, so it has been passed to me to make 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.

I understand that this will come as a disappointment to Mr M, but I find I agree with the investigator for much of the same reasons.

I do appreciate that this situation has caused Mr M some distress and I understand his strength of feeling in this matter. He expected to be able to switch his account from the other financial business to NatWest without issues but ultimately this didn't happen. And when he looked to find out the reasons, the issues weren't explained to him clearly.

NatWest has now accepted it made a mistake and so the only issue left for me to decide is the level of compensation. Mr M doesn't feel that the amount NatWest has offered him is sufficient to compensate him for the impact this has had on him.

I think it's clear Mr M was inconvenienced, he had to visit the branch and make a number of calls to NatWest to try and understand what was happening with the account switch. He wasn't provided clear information as to what he needed to do, how he would be able to claim the account switch incentive, or if he was even eligible for it. He also wasn't contacted about the account switch as he should have been. I think it would have been frustrating for him to have to chase the account switch when he was reasonably expecting it to be a straightforward process.

I need to consider if Mr M would have acted differently if NatWest had done things as it should have. I can't be certain he would have cancelled the account switch process in branch to make a further application online or in the mobile banking app, or if he would have decided to go ahead with the account switch at all, had NatWest contacted him as they should have done. But as NatWest are offering to pay Mr M the £200, he would have expected to receive, I think it is a fair offer in the circumstances.

I also think the additional £50 offered is also fair for the trouble and upset caused to him in chasing the account switch. I say this because Mr M has now been offered a total of £250 in compensation for all the distress and inconvenience caused and he is still free to pursue an account switch online or via the mobile banking app should he wish to do so.

I know Mr M will be disappointed with the outcome, but I've thought about what is fair in the circumstances of this complaint and based on the information provided I think the compensation offered by NatWest is reasonable for the impact of the errors on Mr M. Mr M has mentioned he thinks both financial businesses were working together to conspire against him, but I haven't seen any evidence of this. So I won't be asking NatWest to pay more than what it has already offered.

My final decision

For the reasons mentioned above, I uphold this complaint against National Westminster Bank Plc.

National Westminster Bank Plc should pay Mr M £250 in compensation for the trouble and upset caused to him.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr M to accept or reject my decision before 8 February 2024.

Jag Dhuphar
Ombudsman