

The complaint

Mrs R complains National Savings and Investments (NS&I) didn't allow her to access her money.

What happened

Mrs R had money in two NS&I accounts and lives overseas. Mrs R tried to access her NS&I accounts online and had some problems. Mrs R says she was eventually able to get through the two-step process but couldn't then transact or update her details.

Mrs R contacted NS&I and was told to phone in, but Mrs R says she couldn't then give instructions to NS&I by phone. NS&I also said Mrs R could write in, but this wasn't convenient because of long wait times and the cost as Mrs R was overseas.

Mrs R complained about not being able to access her money. NS&I responded to say Mrs R had entered her details incorrectly too many times and locked herself out.

NS&I said it couldn't take instruction by email, but Mrs R could call or write in. Unhappy with this answer Mrs R brought her complaint to this service.

An investigator looked into things and initially thought NS&I had done enough. After the final response had been sent, NS&I reached out to Mrs R and felt it resolved things. NS&I had paid Mrs R the money from both her accounts, after it received her account details.

NS&I said it did this as an exception to its usual process. NS&I also paid interest to the date it held the money and didn't charge any penalties. Mrs R didn't feel this resolved things and said she'd been trying to log in and update her details several times without success.

The investigator asked for Mrs R's log in records and felt it was more likely than not there'd been issues with NS&I stopping Mrs R logging in. The investigator felt a payment of £100 was fair to compensate Mrs R for the inconvenience.

Mrs R accepted but NS&I didn't. The complaint was 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.

I've looked at the log in records for Mrs R. I can see Mrs R tried numerous times to log in to NS&I's website. On 6 April 2024 Mrs R successfully logged on 11 times, with successful one-time passcode (OTP) challenges – the two-step process.

But, despite successfully logging on it seems Mrs R couldn't withdraw the money from her accounts. On 12 April 2024 Mrs R successfully entered the OTP three times, in quick

succession, but was apparently logged out soon after each log on.

Mrs R then successfully logged on a further six times, all nine log ins were in the space of half an hour. Mrs R then locked her password and couldn't log on again.

I asked NS&I for some comment on why Mrs R might have been logged off so often, but it didn't suggest anything. NS&I said Mrs R had admitted to poor mobile reception, which is true, but Mrs R was receiving OTPs, to her mobile.

A lack of mobile reception, and therefore lack of OTPs, doesn't explain why Mrs R was logged out of her online account so often, especially after successfully entering OTPs.

I think it's more likely there were issues with NS&I's online account, and it was these issues forcing Mrs R out of her online account. Because Mrs R couldn't request the withdrawal online, she couldn't access her money. I think this will have caused inconvenience.

NS&I has focussed on what it did to pay out to Mrs R. NS&I went outside its usual processes to ensure Mrs R could withdraw her money. I agree NS&I helped Mrs R access her money.

But, had Mrs R been able to log on, and withdraw the money herself, NS&I wouldn't have needed to step outside its processes. And NS&I wouldn't have needed to pay Mrs R additional interest or make the decision not to charge penalties.

I think there were problems with NS&I's online account, and these stopped Mrs R being able to withdraw the money herself. Because of this delay, Mrs R was caused inconvenience, there was a substantial amount of money in the accounts, and Mrs R couldn't access it.

Although NS&I did later allow Mrs R to access her money, this was later than I think it should have been. So although NS&I did the right thing in allowing Mrs R to withdraw her money by exception, I think Mrs R should have been able to access the money herself, and sooner.

My final decision

My final decision is National Savings and Investments should pay Mrs R £100 to compensate her for not being able to withdraw her money online.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs R to accept or reject my decision before 10 July 2024.

Chris Russ
Ombudsman