

The complaint

Mr V, on behalf of Miss V complains about the service received from Metro Bank PLC ("Metro"). In particular, he is unhappy it mistakenly changed Miss V's monthly statement preference to paperless. This meant Mr V was unaware of the account balance and interest rate on the account.

What happened

Miss V holds a bank account with Metro which Mr V as her father opened in 2015 and has access to. Metro Bank in error set Miss V's monthly statement preference to paperless. Mr V says he only discovered this recently when he was informed that there was a balance on Miss V's account. Mr V says as he doesn't use Metro for his every day banking and was focussed on other financial matters, so didn't know that there was an issue.

Mr V complained to Metro. Metro accepted that it was its error that led to Miss V's statement preference being set to paperless but says the onus was on Mr V to monitor the account and raise it with Metro if statements weren't being sent. Metro confirmed that the statements wouldn't have had the interest rate on them and that Miss V was sent an annual certificate of interest to her address. By way of apology Metro credited Mr V's account with £75.

Mr V is dissatisfied with this. He says had he been aware of the account balance and interest rate on the account he could've moved the funds to an account with a better rate.

One of our investigator's looked into Mr V's concerns and thought although the certificate of interest didn't provide a balance of the account, it did provide the amount of interest the account was receiving which they thought was enough for Mr V to decide if Miss V could receive a more favourable interest rate elsewhere. Evidence showed that Mr V was aware of the interest rate on the account by August 2022, but despite this funds remained in the account, so the investigator didn't think Miss V had lost out on receiving a better rate of interest as a result of Metro's error.

Furthermore, although they acknowledged the distress and inconvenience Metro's error would've personally caused Mr V, because he isn't the eligible complainant in this complaint – Miss V as the account holder is – they couldn't provide an opinion on the compensation Metro offered Mr V, and they didn't think the impact of Metro's mistake on Miss V warranted any compensation.

Mr V disagreed and asked for an ombudsman's decision on the matter.

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 hope that Mr V won't take it as a discourtesy that I've condensed the complaint in the way that I have. Ours being an informal dispute resolution service I've concentrated on what I consider to be the crux of the complaint. Our rules allow me to do that.

Mr V is unhappy at the service received from Metro – in particular, he is unhappy that it changed Miss V's statement preference to paperless in error resulting in him not knowing what rate of interest she was receiving.

It might help if I explain, my role is to look at the problems Miss V has experienced and see if Metro has done anything wrong or treated her unfairly. If it has, I would seek – if possible - to put Miss V back in the position she would've been in if the mistakes hadn't happened. And I may award compensation that I think is fair and reasonable.

In this case there is no dispute that Metro made an error when it changed Miss V's statement preferences. My understanding is that this error has now been rectified and Miss V statement preference changed back to paper and so is in the position she'd be in had the mistake not happened.

So what I have to decide is whether the mistake Metro made and the impact it had on Miss V warrants compensation.

Firstly, I have to be clear that I can't look at the impact Metro's errors have had on Mr V personally. As our investigator has already explained, this is because I can only look at how Metro's actions have affected the account holder - Miss V – as she is the eligible complainant. So although I accept Mr V may have been inconvenienced by Metro's actions I can't look at compensating him personally for this.

And having considered everything, I'm not persuaded Metro's mistake has had a significant enough impact on Miss V personally that would justify an award of compensation.

I say this because despite not receiving statements for a number of years Miss V nor Mr V queried this. I accept that Metro may not be Mr V's main bank but as I'm sure Mr V appreciates holding a bank account comes with some responsibilities such understanding the status of the account and the amount of money it holds. I think if either Miss V or Mr V were concerned about the status of the account or interest being paid they would've been in touch much sooner, perhaps following receipt of the annual certificate of interest. And although statements weren't being sent by post, Mr V or Miss V was able to view the account statements online if they so wished.

Metro have also evidenced that Mr V was aware that there were funds in the account as early as August 2022 as it confirmed what rate of interest Miss V was receiving in branch. Furthermore, Mr V at times moved funds both in and out of the account, but yet still didn't query the lack of receipt of a statement. So I can't say that not receiving bank statements resulted in Miss V not getting a better rate of interest than she did or that it has been financially detrimental to her.

In any case things don't always go smoothly and mistakes do happen and our role isn't to punish or penalise the businesses we cover. So as I can't see that Miss V has personally suffered any distress and inconvenience by Metro's mistake, I don't think any compensation is warranted or would make a material difference to Miss V's situation.

So on that basis I don't think Metro needs to do anything more and I do not uphold this complaint.

My final decision

For the reasons I've explained, I've decided not to uphold Miss V's complaint against Metro Bank PLC.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss V to accept or reject my decision before 28 May 2024.

Caroline Davies
Ombudsman