

The complaint

Miss S complains that she has been unable to log-in to her account with Frasers Group Financial Services Limited, trading as Studio.

What happened

Miss S has had an account with Studio for many years. She has logged into her account online to manage payments but in September 2023 she could no longer access the system. A message told her details didn't match. Miss S tried on many occasions to contact Studio to resolve the matter but the advice they gave her didn't work and they often repeated the same advice to reset her password. Miss S says they didn't reply to her emails, and they failed to escalate matters when she asked them to.

Eventually, having received no response from Studio, she contacted this Service. Our investigator noted that Studio had failed to provide their file on this issue despite regularly being chased for it. On the information she had she thought Studio had been unfair and she suggested they take some action to resolve matters for Miss S.

Studio didn't respond and Miss S remained dissatisfied with matters, so her complaint has been referred to me, an ombudsman, for 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 don't think studio have been reasonable here and I'm asking them to take some action to put things right for Miss S.

Where the information I've got is incomplete, unclear, or contradictory, as some of it is here, I have to base my decision on the balance of probabilities.

I've read and considered the whole file, but I'll concentrate my comments on what I think is relevant. If I don't comment on any specific point, it's not because I've failed to take it on board and think about it but because I don't think I need to comment on it in order to reach what I think is the right outcome.

Miss S referred her complaint to this Service in September 2023 and I note that Studio have still not provided their case file on Miss S's complaint. They've explained that they are waiting for a response from their IT department and that Miss S was provided with other means by which she could have made payments. But they've not provided any further information.

Miss S, on the other hand, has provided copies of chats and frequent correspondence with studio that demonstrates she was having real difficulty accessing her account. It's clear that advice that hadn't worked, was duplicated, and that emails weren't responded to.

Miss S has refused to pay her bills since September 2023. I'd usually expect a consumer to use other means to pay bills when on-line access was blocked, but Miss S's testimony has persuaded me she hasn't been unreasonable when she has taken that action. She was worried about her account having been hacked as she couldn't understand why the details she had been using successfully for so long, could not be matched, and she was not getting an adequate explanation from Studio.

I think Studio need to take some action to put things right for Miss S.

Putting things right

Studio should send Miss S paper copies of her statements (or emails if they can ensure safe delivery) until the IT issue is resolved and Miss S can access her account again.

They should also remove any adverse information they may have reported to Miss S's credit file since September 2023, as I don't think it will be a fair reflection of Miss S's performance on her account. I'm persuaded Miss S would have paid if she had on-line access as I've been persuaded by her detailed testimony in which she has explained how she manages her debts.

Studio should refund any late payment fees or interest relating to missed payments from September 2023 until the date of settlement.

Miss S has been distressed and inconvenienced by these issues. She will have been worried about the account having been hacked, has been unable to use the account over the Christmas period, and has had to escalate her complaint to this Service when I think it could have been resolved earlier. In those circumstances, I think Studio should pay her £100 compensation.

My final decision

For the reasons I've given above, I uphold this complaint and tell Frasers Group Financial Services Limited to:

- Send Miss S paper, or email, statements until the on-line access issue is resolved.
- Remove any adverse reports they may have made to Miss S's credit file from, and including, September 2023.
- Refund any late payment fees or interest relating to missed payments from September 2023 until the date of settlement. Add 8% simple interest per year to the refund, calculated over the same period.
- Pay Miss S £100 to compensate her for the distress and inconvenience they have caused.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss S to accept or reject my decision before 30 August 2024.

Phillip McMahon
Ombudsman