

## **The complaint**

The estate of Ms D (the estate) complains that National Savings and Investments (NS&I) have provided poor customer service and they have obstructed them in getting information.

## **What happened**

After Ms D passed away, her family discovered some old premium bonds in her belongings which were purchased in the 1950's. One of the executor's contacted NS&I to enquire how he could find the full value of the bonds including any prizes won since the bonds were issued. But he says NS&I refused to read any email that had an attachment, they didn't ask him if he had the original bond certificates (which he does), they asked for information from 1957, and they insisted on their standard form to be completed, even though they wouldn't accept this by email.

The estate says that when the form was sent to NS&I they ignored it and they asked for other information not known. The estate says they lost time, incurred unnecessary costs and they told us about the stress and inconvenience caused by this issue. The estate made a complaint to NS&I.

NS&I did not uphold the estate's complaint, but they sent a warrant for £50 as a goodwill gesture due to postal delays. They said that the estate was unsuccessful in completing the bereavement form due to not having the information, but by completing the postal form with all of the information that they could provide would allow their specialist team to trace the account and process the claim. NS&I said they apologised for postal delays when corresponding with them, but they can't be held responsible for postal errors, as this is not in their control. The estate brought their complaint to our service.

Our investigator did not uphold the estate's complaint. She said she reviewed a copy of the bereavement claim form and it's incomplete. Furthermore, the details of the individual named within it doesn't match the grant of probate, so, it's understandable why NS&I haven't been able to locate Ms D or a product in her name with little details provided. The estate asked for an ombudsman to review the complaint.

## **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.

Firstly, I want to pass my condolences to the estate. The estate have made a number of points to this service, and I've considered and read everything they've said and sent us. But, in line with this service's role as a quick and informal body I'll be focusing on the crux of their complaint in deciding what's fair and reasonable here.

I'd like to explain to the estate that it is not within this service's remit to tell a business how they should run their policies and procedures, such as what they require in order to complete checks on premium bonds, including how they choose to accept this information (for example by post). It would be the role of the regulator – the Financial Conduct Authority, who

have the power to instruct NS&I to make changes to their policies and procedures, if necessary.

I've reviewed the emails which an executor of the estate sent to NS&I. I'm not persuaded that NS&I didn't respond to the emails he sent them, as I can see replies that they've sent to him. NS&I also sent him an email dated 16 March 2023 which said *"In this case, you will need to complete our postal form instead you can find the form here"*. It also said *"With the form, you will need to include a cover letter stating the Bond/holder's numbers. Complete as much of the form as you can"*. But NS&I don't appear to have received the paper form until 1 June 2023. It is dated 19 May 2023 by the executor.

NS&I wrote to the executor on 27 June 2023 explaining that they have been unable to trace any investments for Ms D. I've reviewed the bereavement form that one of the executors completed. I've noted that the forename and address of the person under *"The customer's personal details"* section of the form is different to the forename and address of the person named on the grant of probate that the estate forwarded to our service. So this could be a possible reason why NS&I have not been able to locate any premium bonds.

In addition to this, there is no date of birth of the customer on the bereavement form, or age entered on the form if this was not known. There was no account number entered on the form, as *"not known"* is entered in this box. So although the estate say they have the bonds, it's unlikely these contain the premium bond number(s), otherwise I would have expected them to include this on the form.

So there was very limited information NS&I had to try and locate any premium bonds Ms D held. NS&I have sent our service a system screenshot which shows the forename, surname and postcode of the individual which was named as the customer on the bereavement form. But there were no results on the system screenshot of anyone matching these details.

So that is why NS&I are unable to tell the estate any details about any holdings or prizes won. NS&I have also told us that the existence of the original certificates does not mean that they are still valid and not repaid. It is not mandatory for a customer to send NS&I the original certificate in order to have the holdings paid to them.

I've considered what the estate has said about the lost time, unnecessary costs and the stress and inconvenience caused by this issue. But Ms D is the eligible complainant here. And our service can only make awards to the eligible complainant who had the required relationship with the business. The estate representative brings the matter on Ms D's behalf (as the person authorised in law to do so). So it follows that our service can't compensate an executor for any impact incurred by them personally when representing the estate of Ms D. I do note that NS&I paid £50 as a gesture of goodwill. If this warrant hasn't been encashed yet, then the estate may wish to contact NS&I to reissue this in the event this has expired. But it follows I don't require NS&I to do anything further.

### **My final decision**

I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask the estate of Ms D to accept or reject my decision before 9 September 2024.

Gregory Sloanes  
**Ombudsman**