

## **The complaint**

Miss M complains Barclays Bank UK PLC unfairly closed her account and provided her with poor service.

## **What happened**

The facts of the complaint are well known to both parties, so I will only provide a summary of the key points.

Miss M held a current account with Barclays which was opened in October 2022. Barclays says when the account was opened it was done so with an error on its part. This error meant that it required further identification and verification from Miss M. Barclays wrote to Miss M on 23 October 2023. It doesn't seem Barclays received a response to this, and it issued a notice to close letter on 15 November 2023. This explained Miss M's account would close on 16 January 2024. The account was due to close as Barclays hadn't received the necessary information from Miss M.

On 9 December 2023 Miss M attended branch and her profile was updated at this time. Miss M made a large international transfer on 12 January 2024. However, account still closed in January 2024. Barclays accepts the closure was in error, as Miss M attended branch with the necessary identification documents.

Miss M attended branch on 16 January 2024 to try and access the funds within the account. Miss M says during this branch visit she was treated poorly by staff due to her race.

Following Miss M's experience with her account she raised a formal complaint about the handling of her account. Miss M explained Barclays treated her unfairly by closing her account and the service she received was unacceptable. Barclays reviewed her complaint and issued a final response letter on 26 January 2024. Barclays' response explained the account had been closed appropriately and there was no bank error. It also explained that there wasn't any evidence of poor service when Miss M attend branch or during phone calls.

Miss M had also recently made an international payment and queried the process and time taken to complete this. In its response Barclays explained the international payment can take up to seven days and there were no identified issues with this payment.

Unhappy with the response received from Barclays Miss M referred her complain to our service, highlighting her main concern that she had been treated in a discriminatory manner. Barclays reviewed Miss M's complaint again before making submissions to this service. In light of its review Barclays made a pro-active offer to Miss M.

Barclays recognised there had been service failings on its part, and that the fundamental cause of the issues Miss M experienced was due to its error when the account was initially set up. Barclays offered Miss M £250 in recognition of the distress and inconvenience caused to Miss M. In particular it said this amount was offered to reflect the multiple branch visits and phone calls Miss M had to make. Miss M didn't accept this offer. Miss M maintained she had been treated in a discriminatory manner by Barclays and its offer didn't

adequately reflect the distress she experienced. The Investigator reviewed the complaint and in summary, made the following findings:

- Had Barclays not made errors when setting up Miss M's account it would not have closed in the manner it did.
- Multiple errors occurred which meant Miss M experienced significant distress and inconvenience.
- Miss M says she feels discriminated against and given her poor experience with Barclays it's understandable why she feels this way.
- Barclays should pay Miss M £400 in recognition of the service failings she experienced.

Miss M accepted the recommendations. Barclays disagreed with the recommendations, explaining that Miss M had other accounts that she could rely on and the balance on her account was nil from July 2023 onwards. Barclays also said that its staff shouldn't have to deal with abusive behaviour in branch, so it didn't think Miss M should be further compensated for her experience in branch. It said the £250 offered adequately reflected the distress and inconvenience caused.

As no agreement could be reached, the complaint was referred to 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.

Firstly, I'm aware that I've only summarised Miss M's complaint points. No discourtesy is intended by this. Our rules allow me to take this approach. It simply reflects the informal nature of our service as a free alternative to the courts. I can assure Miss M I have carefully considered her complaint points.

#### *Account checks and closure*

Barclays has accepted that when Miss M's account opened it did so with an error which meant Miss M had to attend branch with identification. As detailed above, although Miss M attended branch and the necessary identification verification took place her account still closed.

Barclays says this shouldn't have happened – and that its compensation recognises this error. I understand Barclays says Miss M had other accounts and her Barclays account wasn't her main one. Barclays comments suggest that the impact on Miss M wasn't as serious as outlined by the Investigator because of this. However, looking at the timeline of events from Miss M's perspective I can appreciate her frustration and concern over the situation. Miss M had received a notice to close letter – which was issued due to the incorrect application of an identification marker on her account. Miss M followed the necessary instructions and attended branch with the relevant identification. However, the account continued to close.

Given Miss M had a balance on the account and had followed the steps outlined to her I think the closure would've caused her distress, especially as she had used the account recently for a large international transfer. I also find Barclays' initial review and final response letter failed to properly acknowledge the issues Miss M had experienced.

#### *Branch visit*

I have thought about Miss M's comments about what happened in branch, and I am sorry to learn she feels he was poorly treated. As part of Barclays' review its obtained testimony from staff who have explained their version of events. These accounts refer to Miss M being verbally abusive to staff members.

There is no CCTV footage of Miss M's visit to branch. I've therefore thought carefully about Miss M's comments alongside the comments of branch staff. I appreciate Barclays has a duty to its staff, and the evidence its provided shows staff didn't feel Miss M behaved appropriately. I've considered this in light of Miss M's comments about the questioning she experienced. I can't say for certain what happened during this visit, but it is clear from considering both sides that this was a challenging and difficult interaction.

Miss M says that he is a victim of discrimination as the staff in branch treated her with a hostile attitude. While I can appreciate this is her perspective, it is not my role to decide whether discrimination has taken place – only the courts have the power to decide this. I have, however, considered the relevant law in relation to what Miss M has said when deciding what I think is the fair and reasonable outcome. Part of this has meant considering the provisions of The Equality Act 2010 (The Act). After looking at the available evidence I can't say for certain Miss M has been discriminated against due to her race.

However, I can understand why Miss M feels this way given the numerous issues she had experienced with Barclays up until this point. It seems the customer service received fell below reasonable standards, and this alongside her experience in branch left Miss M feeling she was being treated differently.

Santander says £250 adequately reflects the upset Miss M experienced. But given the timeline of events I think £400 more accurately represents fair compensation.

#### *Request for phone calls*

In its submissions to this service Barclays explained that in a call on 21 January 2024 between Miss M and Barclays it was established that Barclays held the incorrect address for Miss M. As part of Miss M's complaint, she has raised GDPR requests for phone calls to be sent to her. However, Barclays has explained that in order for it to release this information to Miss M it needs to hold an up-to-date address for Miss M. This means Miss M will need to attend branch again with her identification details and proof of address. Barclays will then be able to remove the necessary marker and issue her with the calls she has requested.

I appreciate Miss M will find this additional requirement frustrating given her experience to date. The requirements Barclays has in place is to ensure information is securely shared and I'm satisfied it's a reasonable request considering its data protection obligations.

#### **Putting things right**

Barclays Bank UK PLC should put things right as outlined below:

- Pay Miss M £400 in recognition of the distress and inconvenience caused to her by its actions.

#### **My final decision**

I uphold this complaint. I now direct Barclays Bank UK PLC to put things right as outlined above.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss M to accept or reject my decision before 2 January 2025.

Chandni Green  
**Ombudsman**