

The complaint

Ms M complains Equifax Limited incorrectly reported data on her credit file and failed to adequately respond to her contacts.

What happened

My understanding is Ms M contacted Equifax on 27 December 2022 saying she'd received contact telling her 'Something's changed' on her credit file. This was a follow up to a previous complaint, so it related to ongoing issues – but wasn't something Equifax had addressed as a complaint previously. Ms M wanted to know why her Electoral Roll (ER) information was wrong, and her credit score hadn't increased to the same figure it was before.

Equifax dealt with this as a query and explained a loan from a bank I'll refer to as H had been added to her credit file – but at a different address. The reply from Equifax went on to explain the summary section and 'Things to Note' sections of her credit file would tell her what the positive and negative changes are. And they explained the credit score is based on information which appears on Ms M's credit file – and she'll see fluctuations in the score due to data providers updating information all the time.

Ms M says this didn't answer her question properly – and on 8 January 2023 she asked for a written copy of the complaint she'd made. She said they didn't reply to this and closed her request down. She raised another request 10 January 2023, and after six weeks no reply had been received. Ms M also questioned why they told her she was on the ER between 2018-2022 but then reported she'd been on it for zero years. She was also unhappy Equifax said the reason for some of the problems was due to H reporting her at a different address when they always had the correct one – she felt this was Equifax's fault. Finally, Ms M was also concerned she was told another lender was reporting an account without a door number, when she could clearly see the account showed correctly with the door number.

Responding formally to Ms M's complaint in March 2023, Equifax said when Ms M got in touch on 27 December 2022, they didn't treat this as a complaint, they treated it as a query. They explained what they'd said to Ms M (which I've set out above). They also said Ms M had raised multiple queries / complaints regarding the same matter, and in respect of their acknowledgement of complaints in particular they had eight weeks in which to provide a full response. Overall, they didn't uphold Ms M's complaint.

Ms M raised these concerns while we were dealing with her previous complaint. We ultimately set up a new complaint, and one of our Investigators considered things. Overall, he upheld Ms M's case, and awarded her £150.

Ms M accepted this, but Equifax didn't. They said Ms M's contact on 27 December 2022 wasn't a complaint, it was a query. And they said given the specific content their replies to this and other queries was fine. So, as Equifax didn't agree, the complaint's been 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.

Based on all the information I've got I understand all the information on Ms M's credit file is correct – so what I need to decide is whether I think Equifax treated Ms M fairly in their responses to her.

Ms M's initial contact which has started this complaint was as follows:

On 2nd and 4th of December I received emails from you telling me – Something's changed. My electoral register record had gone from 3 to zero and my credit score had gone down from 645 to 507. My credit score is now 556 and my time on the electoral register is again correct.

What has happened? Why has my credit score been lowered?

Given this, I can understand why Equifax disagree with our Investigator who said this was a complaint not a query – but I do think Equifax still didn't handle things properly.

In context of the overall contact Ms M was raising, she was actually asking why her time on the ER was *incorrect*. I realise she's written 'correct' – so I can understand Equifax may have been a bit confused.

But, rather unhelpfully, Equifax also didn't provide a copy of what Ms M had actually said until several months after she first requested it. So, they never gave her the opportunity to correct their understanding of her contact. And, as I said before, in the context of the overall contact Ms M was raising at the time I think they should have known what she meant – or at the very least taken better care when answering her.

This led to Equifax effectively ignoring Ms M's concerns about the ER having been reduced. Why Ms M saw the ER was wrong isn't something Equifax can now explain due to the time that's passed. But I understand it's correct now. In summary, on this point, I overall agree that Equifax didn't handle things fairly for Ms M.

In respect of the account being reported by H they did report this as the address Ms M has said was wrong – so I can't fairly hold Equifax responsible for this. I'm aware Ms M believes this led to her credit score being lower – but, as Ms M now understands – her credit score is for her information only. Lenders don't see her credit score, instead they get details about how she's run her accounts and formulate their own score.

And finally I agree the other lender did report Ms M's account initially without a door number – Equifax have provided internal evidence showing this. So, this led to that account not being reported in the same way as others. This means I don't think Equifax did anything wrong in how they were reporting things – and I can see they told Ms M about this on 10 January 2023.

Overall then, I'm partially upholding this case due to the communication around Ms M's contact on 27 December 2022.

It is disappointing to see Ms M having made several requests for what I would suggest was a very simple task to complete – sending her a copy of the contact on 27 December 2022.

Despite this simple request, she didn't get anything for several months, and because of Equifax's misunderstanding of her issues – brought on by not dealing with her contact in the context of other issues and by not giving Ms M an opportunity to clarify things – this has caused Ms M more inconvenience than I'd expect. I think £150 compensation fairly reflects this.

My final decision

For the reasons I've explained above, I uphold this complaint and require Equifax Limited to pay Ms M £150 compensation.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms M to accept or reject my decision before 10 October 2024.

Jon Pearce
Ombudsman