

The complaint

Miss L is unhappy that Barclays Bank UK PLC were unable to verify her identification details when she tried to open an account online. After two attempts to open the online account Miss L contacted Barclays as she didn't think the accounts had opened. Miss L wanted Barclays to ensure that the account did open. Miss L was looking for the online system to accept her identification and was given the impression by the system the account hadn't opened, and she would need to take further action.

Miss L was also unhappy with the way Barclays Bank UK PLC handled her complaint when she raised it. She felt she was clear with Barclays that she wanted to complain, but the call handler insisted she needed to contact this organisation to complain. Miss L pointed out to the call handler that clearly isn't the process, she could complain to Barclays, and it ought to deal with her complaint. Miss L said Barclays isn't following clear rules and guidance about how it should deal with customer complaints.

What happened

Miss L didn't think she had been able to complete the set up of her new bank account with Barclays as the system notified her of an error when she added her identification. Miss L made two attempts to try and get the account open. Unfortunately, she got the error message on both attempts. As far as Miss L was concerned, she hadn't successfully opened a Barclays account. Miss L noted at this point that she had already passed identification on her other Barclays product – a mortgage application.

However, afterwards Miss L did get numerous emails from Barclays that gave the impression two accounts may have been opened for her. These welcomed her and confirmed she had chosen to have a paperless account. Miss L was unclear if this was correct or if these were fraudulent letters. Miss L contacted Barclays but found it to be unhelpful in getting to the details of what had happened. Miss L said Barclays was hugely patronising and dismissive during one call in particular. Barclays were unable to trace her details despite the mortgage application and the emails she had received confirming she was now a bank account customer too. Barclays indicated if Miss L did want to open an account or discuss the issues she would need to do it in person at a branch – she was advised there was no other way.

During this particular call she was also told there was no errors made by the bank and she had suffered no customer detriment. Miss L found this all hugely frustrating as this was a fee paying account. If the accounts were open, she was being denied access and she was worried she might be facing charges for the privilege of accounts she was unable to access and unclear if they even existed.

When Miss L told Barclays she now wished to complain about the service she was receiving and the lack of clear information she was denied this. When she asked if she could speak to a manager, she was told there were no managers in the whole department. Miss L said this was a failure to comply with current and forthcoming regulation. Miss L said the call handler also told her that Barclays don't issues complaint final responses and pushed her to bring her complaint to this service.

Miss L did bring her complaint to this service and said there would be issues with her credit score in view of the problems caused for her with these accounts. During her complaint to this service Miss L decided she didn't want Barclays to set her accounts up now, instead she decided that she wanted them to close the accounts.

Our investigator upheld the complaint. He said Barclays hadn't addressed Miss L's concerns about the accounts and her personal information. He said Barclays had been unhelpful and it should pay Miss L £100 for the errors and mistakes that had caused upset to Miss L regarding her attempts to open the account. He said in line with the rules that guide this service we are unable to deal with the issues raised by Miss L about Barclays handling of her complaint.

Based on the request from Miss L our investigator did ask Barclays to close the accounts and it did confirm this had been completed.

Miss L didn't accept our investigators view and added that the credit searches against her record were lowering her credit score, so she now wanted Barclays not just to close any accounts but to have also removed the accounts from all records.

In my recent provisional decision, I said:

"I can understand why Miss L was frustrated and upset by Barclays actions. It's clear from the information provided by her that she was under the impression the account hadn't opened. Miss L said the online system declined her application when she added her identification details. So, I can also understand her concern when she then received details of two accounts from Barclays. I think it would be a further worry to then be told when she contacted Barclays that it couldn't find any details of her on the system. She was already a mortgage customer and it had opened the two accounts for her at this point, even though she was unaware that the accounts had in fact been opened.

I get the feeling Miss L felt Barclays rather tried to close down her concerns at this point with the insistence she needed to visit a branch. The upset, worry or frustration she was feeling already would only have been heightened by this. Miss L made the point that the accounts were ones she would have to pay for so she was also concerned she was running up costs for something she couldn't use. For the record, if Barclays has any records of any costs it has linked to Miss L it needs to remove these and clear any records of any such costs without any charge to Miss L.

Barclays hasn't been able to produce any useful evidence to defend its actions regarding the issues with the online system. It hasn't provided any points around Miss L's attempts to verify her identification details or why it wasn't able to find any records of Miss L and her accounts when she contacted it. I think that leaves me with only the evidence of Miss L to make a finding on. Based on the details I have - Barclays have acted unreasonably and unfairly.

Barclays did close the accounts once Miss L requested this to be done via this service. But understandably in the circumstances Miss L doesn't feel that's enough to put her back in a position she was prior to these issues. As she said there's been an impact on her credit record. Miss L asked this service to get Barclays to remove all record and trace of the two accounts and remove all the account records. Effectively, Miss L wants there to be no trace of these accounts anywhere. In the circumstances of how Barclays have been unable to deal with any of her requirements I think that's a reasonable request. It's clear that Miss L has had no benefit from the accounts since the moment they were opened. So, it would be fair for Barclays to put her back in the position she would have been if the accounts had never

existed in the first place. I would like Barclays to delete all records of the two accounts it opened and to clear all trace of these two accounts.

I also understand Miss L's point about the way she felt Barclays treated her when she attempted to open a complaint. It's clear that Barclays didn't do as she requested and instead insisted that she needed to contact this service to raise a complaint. I'm not going to go into details on that point as Miss L has already said that isn't the process and Barclays has to comply with regulatory requirements. But in line with those regulatory requirements complaint handling isn't a regulated activity that this service has the power to investigate. So, I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to make a finding on this.

In terms of the issues Miss L encountered with Barclays, the problems opening the accounts, the fact it couldn't identify her records when she contacted it, how it was unable to sort out a way of Miss L accessing and using her accounts, how Miss L was receiving emails suggesting she had two accounts but being unable to access them or use them, worries about any costs and her concern about the impact on her credit score, the lack of service and the delays throughout, I can understand why Miss L felt such upset and frustration. I think Barclays ought to pay Miss L £200 for the distress and inconvenience it has caused her."

responses to my provisional decision

Miss L didn't respond to my provisional decision.

Barclays did respond. It said it agreed with the ombudsman's findings. Barclays said if Miss L agrees it will arrange for the records to be cleared and the payment to be made.

Barclays asked our investigator to get bank details from Miss L so it can pay the distress and inconvenience amount to her.

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 the response received I see no reason to change my provisional decision. My provisional decision becomes my final decision.

Putting things right

- Remove any record and trace of both of the opened accounts and treat them as if they never existed.
- If any costs for the accounts have in any way been recorded against Miss L's details these costs are removed and all records are wiped from all records.
- Pay Miss L £200 for the distress and inconvenience caused.

My final decision

I uphold this complaint.

I require Barclays Bank UK PLC to:

- Remove any record and trace of both of the opened accounts and treat them as if they never existed.

- If any costs for the accounts have in any way been recorded against Miss L's details these costs are removed and all records are wiped from all records.
- Pay Miss L £200 for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss L to accept or reject my decision before 23 July 2024.

John Quinlan
Ombudsman