

The complaint

Ms H complains that Bank of Scotland Plc, trading as Halifax cannot tell her what happened to funds she found in her passbooks.

What happened

In April 2024, Ms H contacted Halifax as she had found two passbooks relating to savings accounts previously held with them. The passbooks showed deposits of over £72,000 and Ms H wanted to know whether the funds had ever been transferred out of the accounts.

Ms H asked Halifax to look for the money as she couldn't be sure whether the accounts had been closed and the money transferred, but they had no record of them. They explained that they weren't able to locate any details about either account and that it may be the case that as the accounts were historic, they no longer held any records and they therefore weren't able to say whether or not the accounts had been closed. They advised Ms H to raise the matter on a website which could possibly help with the lost accounts.

Ms H brought her complaint to our service and our investigator asked her for some more information such as any other products she held with them, any previous postcodes of places she had lived in the past (most importantly when she opened and held the accounts), or any other names she may have gone by.

Ms H provided further details, and the information was passed over to Halifax. However after further searches, Halifax still weren't able to find any record of the accounts. As the accounts were monthly saver accounts, Halifax also searched Ms H's current accounts for evidence of any past transactions, however that search also failed to find anything.

Because of this, our investigator was of the opinion that Halifax had done all they could to locate the funds. Due to the amount of time that had passed, he explained it may have been the case that the funds had been transferred into another account once Halifax stopped using passbooks, to allow them to be digitally monitored. However, he wasn't able to say for certain as there wasn't any concrete evidence to suggest this did happen.

Ms H disagreed with the investigator's view. She wanted to know what had happened to the money and was unhappy with the fact that Halifax aren't required to keep records of old accounts.

Because of this, Ms H asked for her case to be passed 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.

After considering everything, I agree with the investigator for the same reasons. I will explain why.

Generally, businesses only tend to keep information on their records for, on average, six years. I understand Ms H is unhappy that this is the case and feels they should keep records of what happens to old accounts, but there are guidelines around records management that most businesses follow. And these suggest keeping information for a limited amount of time, but not forever.

Halifax have confirmed that they searched their systems with all the information they had available in relation to Ms H, and unfortunately they weren't able to find any accounts that match the description or product number given.

Halifax provided screen shots showing they hold extensive records of accounts Ms H has held with them, however none of the records match the accounts in question.

Halifax also carried out a further search after Ms H provided more information about previous addresses and surnames etc, however they were still unable to find anything.

Halifax have explained they have done all they can in an attempt to find what happened to the money, and I am minded to agree. From the information provided I can see that an extensive search has been carried out, but unfortunately they accounts or what happened to the funds can't be found.

In order for me to direct Halifax to pay anything to Ms H, I'd need to be satisfied that the most likely answer was that they made a mistake along the line which meant the money is still with them somewhere. And with the evidence I have, I'm not able to say that.

So overall, while I appreciate the frustration this situation has caused Ms H as she doesn't know what happened to the money, I am satisfied Halifax did all they could to try and locate the account, and that they provided Ms H with as much information as possible as and when they had it. Because of this, I won't be asking them to do anything further.

I know this will come as a disappointment to Ms H, but I hope I have explained why I'm not able to ask Halifax to do anything more.

My final decision

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms H to accept or reject my decision before 19 September 2024.

Danielle Padden
Ombudsman