

The complaint

Mr C complains about the usability of the app provided by National Westminster Bank Plc (NatWest) and, how they dealt with his subsequent complaint. Mr C is represented by a third party who I will refer to as B.

What happened

In March 2024, Mr C, with the help of B attempted to use his NatWest app to transfer funds but due to the security features, his account was locked which necessitated him to telephone NatWest. Mr C, again with the help of B made the call and after several hours, eventually the account was unlocked. B then logged a complaint online with NatWest about their experience which NatWest investigated.

A few days later, NatWest issued a final response letter to Mr C, breaking the complaint into two issues. In terms of the app issue, they said no error had occurred as Mr C had failed their security process sufficient times to block the account; and they provided instructions as to what Mr C could do in future. In terms of the second issue involving the telephone call, NatWest apologised for the level of service received saying they could have handled things better, and they had passed B's comments to the relevant team and the staff member involved would receive coaching. To put things right, NatWest credited Mr C's account with £70, £30 for the telephone call, and £40 for the distress and inconvenience caused. NatWest also wrote to B saying they had provided a full response to Mr C.

B responded to NatWest saying they were dissatisfied with NatWest's handling of his complaint, mainly because despite B logging the complaint, it was Mr C that received the final response letter meaning B felt their data had been shared with a third party. NatWest wrote back to B explaining that B had no authority on Mr C's account, therefore they issued the response and compensation to him.

Unhappy with NatWest's stance, B referred the complaint to our service. Our investigator didn't think that NatWest needed to do anything further. Our investigator also regarded the compensation figures as fair in view of the account being restored after a few hours, and added that our service can't award compensation to representatives, only eligible complainants.

B rejected our investigator's view, asking for more information from NatWest, and referring the matter to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Remaining unhappy, B requested an ombudsman review their 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.

I have looked carefully at all the information NatWest have provided to see if it has acted within its terms and conditions, followed due process, and to see if it treated Mr C and B fairly.

What's not in question is whether NatWest made a mistake, specifically the quality of the service they provided in the telephone call that B and Mr C made. I'm pleased to see that NatWest acknowledged the issue, apologised, delivered feedback, and awarded compensation.

In terms of the issues Mr C had with the app, I'm sorry to hear that it caused distress and frustration. And whilst it's regrettable that Mr C failed NatWest's verification process that day, it's vital that financial institutions such as NatWest have in place robust processes and procedures to protect their customers and themselves. So I can't find a case to answer here for NatWest to do anymore.

Moving onto the telephone call, NatWest have demonstrated that they have learned from what happened and detailed the actions they took as a result. Again, I can't reasonably ask NatWest to do anything further.

B sent significant correspondence to our service around NatWest's delay in providing information, and how she considered it to be a data breach, the sending of their response to Mr C, despite B logging the matter. I've not seen any evidence that B was authorised to complain on Mr C's behalf to NatWest, so I can understand why they responded directly to Mr C. And in terms of the delays of which B speaks, I'm aware of their referral to the ICO so this may be something B may be able to pursue with them.

In conclusion, I think NatWest's app security process was fair and reasonable with regard to Mr C. And it appears to have been followed correctly. That NatWest have acknowledged and compensated for their error shows their customer focus. In terms of the compensation that NatWest credited to Mr C, looking at the inconvenience that Mr C suffered, I regard it as fair. And so I cannot require it to take any further compensatory action towards him, or indeed consider compensation for B.

My final decision

For the reasons I have given it is my final decision that the complaint is not upheld.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr C to accept or reject my decision before 6 November 2024.

Chris Blamires
Ombudsman