

## **The complaint**

Miss C has complained that The Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Limited told her that she only has a pension policy worth around £16,000, which would provide her with a yearly income of £1,480. But Miss C has said that she has other investments which Royal London have denied exist.

## **What happened**

The investigator who considered this matter set out the background to the complaint in her assessment of the case. I'm broadly setting out the same background below, with some amendments for the purposes of this decision.

An Abbey National (now Royal London) application form was completed in April 1998 for Miss C's pension plan ending 823. On the application form it was indicated that the monthly contribution would be £45.50. Miss C's contributions were invested in the With Profits fund.

Contributions into the pension plan then stopped on 27 September 2011. Miss C has provided the policy endorsement confirming this.

Total contributions paid into the pension were £10,036.50. Royal London sent Miss C a full contribution history in a letter dated 19 December 2023.

The investigator's understanding was that Miss C was disappointed with the value of her pension plan, and that she'd been provided with an illustration showing the amount she might receive at age 60 as being £1,480 pa.

But having considered the matter, the investigator didn't think that the complaint should be upheld. She said the following in summary:

- £1,480 pa was an illustration of what Miss C may receive at age 60. But Miss C was planning to take her pension as a lump sum before the age of 60, following acceptance of her ill health claim.
- Further, the illustration said that the amount of £1,480 wasn't guaranteed and was dependent upon, amongst other things, how Miss C's pension performed.
- Whilst the investigator said that she understood that the value of the pension isn't what Miss C had been expecting, the information received from both Miss C and Royal London didn't persuade her that the pension value provided by Royal London was incorrect.
- Since 2021, Miss C and Royal London had spoken about taking pension benefits early due to ill health. Royal London sent the forms it needed completing for Miss C to take the value of her pension as a lump sum on several occasions. The form was called "Uncrystallised Fund Pension Lump Sum" and Miss C had mentioned that her pension plan wasn't invested in the Uncrystallised Fund.

- But the mention of “Uncrystallised Fund” didn’t refer to the fund Miss C’s pension was invested in. The “Uncrystallised Fund Pension Lump Sum” or ‘UFPLS’ for short, was the term used when the pension plan holder wished to take a lump sum from their pension.
- It was the investigator’s understanding that Miss C’s bank would assist her in completing the required forms. And in a conversation with Miss C, the investigator had also said that Miss C may be able to receive assistance from the Citizens Advice Bureau. However, there was also an organisation called Money Helper which might be able to assist Miss C.
- The investigator thought that there’d been some confusion around the pension plans and investments held by Miss C. But she explained that the only policy she held with Royal London was the pension plan in question here, and that this was invested in the With Profits plan. Miss C had held a life assurance policy, but this had been paid out in 2009 in respect of this and so it no longer existed.

In response, Miss C said again that she thought she had a pension plan with 21 funds and that she wanted to withdraw her money.

But having checked again, the investigator said that Royal London had confirmed that Miss C only had a pension policy which was invested in the With Profits fund.

The investigator added that Miss C would need to provide the information requested by Royal London to withdraw her pension funds.

Miss C said that she was facing very challenging circumstances in her living situation and reiterated that she needed the money from her pension and that there should be more investments than just that policy.

The investigator confirmed that the matter would be referred to an ombudsman for review, and also said that Miss C would be able to access her pension funds whilst the complaint was being considered by this service.

Following further discussions, the investigator confirmed that Royal London would be looking at ways for Miss C to access her pension benefits.

Miss C said that Royal London was sending her the wrong forms and that it was referring to an endowment policy. But the investigator confirmed again that Miss C held a pension policy.

Royal London then confirmed that it had put in place simplified requirements for Miss C to be able to access her pension benefits, and although phone calls hadn’t been productive, it had emailed Miss C with the details of its requirements.

The matter has now been referred to me for review.

### **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’d firstly say that I have great sympathy for Miss C’s current situation, and, as with the investigator, in this decision I’m going to do as much as I can to help her to access her

pension benefits.

Before I do so, however, I should explain that my findings in terms of the plan or plans which Miss C holds with Royal London are the same as the investigator's. Royal London has confirmed that Miss C only has this pension plan with it, and that there are no other investments. And in the absence of other evidence to support the position that there should be other investments, my conclusion is that Miss C has this plan – a pension policy which has been invested in Royal London's With Profits fund.

Within that fund, there will be all kinds of different investments, such as equities (stocks and shares), bonds and cash. But it's a lower risk type of fund which is meant to experience less volatile returns than simply investing in equities.

Further, although I note that Miss C has said that Royal London refers to the plan as an endowment policy, and sends her the wrong forms to withdraw her pension funds, I'm satisfied that Royal London understands it to be a pension policy as well.

Turning then to the matter of how Miss C can access her pension funds, there are unfortunately certain requirements which she needs to fulfil for Royal London to be able to release the money to her. I can see that it's put in place a set of simplified identification requirements and that it's willing to work with Miss C to try to find a solution to provide her with her much needed pension funds.

I understand that Miss C has been using her bank to help her fill in the required forms. And although I note that Miss C thinks that they might be the wrong forms, I'm confident that Royal London has sent the correct forms.

So if Miss C wishes to access her pension funds, as I understand is definitely the case here to help with her living situation, I would urge Miss C to either complete those forms, or seek help from her bank in doing so. It should also be able to help with any identification requirements.

Failing that, and as pointed out by the investigator, there are other organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau which will be able to help Miss C complete the required forms.

Unfortunately this service is one designed to resolve disputes between individuals and businesses, so we wouldn't be able to help in the completion of the forms. What we can do, however, and what I hope Miss C will appreciate has happened here, is look into the complaint and check whether anything has gone wrong.

And for the reasons given by the investigator, and as repeated above, I don't think Royal London has done anything wrong here. Further, I'm satisfied that it's trying help Miss C access her funds by sending the right forms and simplifying its usual procedures.

As I've said above, I appreciate how important it is to Miss C that she's able to withdraw her pension money and so I'd recommend that Miss C now works with Royal London as much as possible to do so.

**My final decision**

My final decision is that I don't uphold the complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss C to accept or reject my decision before 15 November 2024.

Philip Miller  
**Ombudsman**