

## **The complaint**

Mr S complains that Clydesdale Bank Plc trading as Virgin Money didn't make him aware of companion vouchers he was entitled to. The vouchers have since expired.

## **What happened**

Mr S has held a credit card with Virgin Money since around 2017. He's also been a member of the Virgin Flying Club since the same time.

Mr S recently discovered from a friend that the credit card account entitled him to a companion voucher on flights, provided that certain conditions are met. Mr S telephoned the Virgin Flying Club and was advised that he'd had three companion vouchers awarded but these had expired.

Mr S complained to Virgin. He said he'd never been told that he'd been awarded a companion voucher and he was unhappy that he'd lost out on a benefit worth thousands of pounds.

Virgin issued a final response on 21 June 2024. It said the terms and conditions of the account set out the spend limits required to unlock benefits such as companion vouchers and flight upgrades. Virgin said it had looked into why Mr S hadn't received notifications and said it hadn't issued manual notifications prior to October 2022. Virgin said that prior to October 2022 it was the customers responsibility to check eligibility for vouchers by contacting Virgin Money, the Flying Club or in the Flying Club app.

Mr S remained unhappy and brought his complaint to this service. He wants Virgin Money to reissue the companion vouchers so that he gets a fair opportunity to use them.

Our investigator didn't uphold the complaint. He said that prior to October 2022 it was the customers responsibility to check what points they had and whether they were entitled to a reward, which could be done by looking at the monthly statements or contacting Virgin Money, the Flying Club or by using the Flying Club app. The investigator said he could see that Mr S had used one voucher which he'd been awarded having hit the spend target on 16 May 2022, which was before Virgin Money introduced notifications, so it was likely that Mr S was aware of what he needed to do to check what rewards he was entitled to. The investigator said he was unable to say that Virgin Money had made any errors.

Mr S didn't agree. He said it was unfair to expect a customer to check for rewards and said that in any event, there was no way to check on the Flying Club app and the only way to check was to call the Flying Club, whose line was always busy. Mr S said that when he spoke to the Flying Club the agent advised him that she heard similar complaints very often. Mr S said he hadn't known about the voucher awarded for hitting the spend target on 16 May 2022 until he complained, and it was at this point that he used it. Mr S said it was unfair that Virgin Money hadn't told him about his vouchers and asked for them to be reinstated.

Because Mr S didn't agree I've been asked to review the 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've reviewed the terms and conditions. These appear on the Virgin Money website and set out the conditions of the companion voucher scheme, including how points can be earned and the spend requirement to earn a Flying Club reward voucher. The terms state that the voucher will automatically be added to your Flying Club account within 30 days of earning it and gives details of the number to call to redeem the voucher. The terms also state that vouchers are valid for 24 months from the date of issue.

Mr S has told this service that he knew he would be entitled to vouchers as an incentive with the credit card, but he wasn't told when he qualified for vouchers and wasn't notified that the vouchers he had earned had been expiring/had expired.

Virgin Money has explained that it only introduced notification of vouchers from October 2022 and that prior to this it was the customers responsibility to check when they had earned vouchers. Since October 2022 customers have been sent an email advising when they have earned a voucher.

Mr S has said that he doesn't think it was fair for Virgin Money to expect customers to check to see whether they had earned vouchers prior to October 2022.

Whilst I understand Mr S's strength of feeling about this, the way in which customers are notified (or not) about rewards is a business decision for Virgin Money. This service isn't able to interfere with that business decision and so I can't say that the decision not to send notifications prior to October 2022 was wrong.

Having read the terms and conditions of the companion voucher scheme and taking into account Mr S's acknowledgement that he knew that vouchers were an incentive with the card, I think Mr S knew – or ought to have known – the spending target he needed to achieve in order to qualify for a reward voucher. I can see that the points/spending total on the card is detailed on the statement, which would've been sent to Mr S each month. I don't think it was unreasonable in these circumstances for Virgin Money to expect customers to check to see whether they had earned a voucher.

In addition to the monthly statements, there were other ways in which Mr S could've checked his entitlement, such as by contacting Virgin Money, the Flying Club or the Flying Club app.

Mr S has said that the Flying Club app doesn't show whether you have been awarded any vouchers. I've looked into this and if you select "My account" and then go to the "Vouchers" page, any current vouchers will appear there.

I understand how disappointed Mr S is about the expiry of his reward vouchers. However, having looked at all of the available information, I'm unable to say that Virgin Money has made an error or treated Mr S unfairly or unreasonably.

## **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 Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 3 December 2024.

Emma Davy  
**Ombudsman**