

The complaint

Mr O complains that Barclays Bank UK PLC made a negligent mistake in linking his profile with his brother's on a new account that didn't involve him. He said this led to problems and uncertainties and stress in his purchasing of a property and with his credit score.

What happened

Mr O said in January 2024 he and his partner were in the process of buying a property, and obtained a joint mortgage offer from Barclays. The build completion date was then delayed until September. He said their mortgage adviser suggested that they not open joint accounts as they would need to extend their offer and wouldn't want any further credit checks.

In March 2024 Mr O's brother asked for his account number, but Mr O's name appeared on the app for his brother's new account. Mr O was very concerned about this due to the advice he'd received. He said Barclays' member of staff had mistakenly opened the account using his profile and had attempted to rectify this by changing his profile to that of his brother.

Mr O said Barclays said he wouldn't be affected as no accounts were under his name and the mortgage offer did not then exist. Mr O visited the branch in March 2024 and said his mortgage offer was still valid and didn't include his brother's details. He was shown how to set up a new profile, which he found very stressful as he had to provide information on the spot. He completed the process so his mortgage offer would appear under this 'new' profile.

Barclays told Mr O his credit score should be fine, but sent him his brother's debit card and PIN, which he said was a breach of his brother's security and privacy. In April Mr O's credit file reported a new current account, despite Mr O raising his concerns in branch, but his mortgage offer was extended. He then found his name was shown again on his brother's app which showed a link between his mortgage application and his brother's profile.

In May, Mr O and his brother went to the branch to resolve the issue and complain. He said after a long wait Barclays' member of staff committed to resolving Barclays' errors. At this time Mr O went into *'the contract exchange period of our house purchase'*, which depended on the mortgage being in place and he was concerned about the names being accurate. However, his brother received a letter in his name about the amendment of his profile.

Mr O wanted Barclays to revert his profile to include his details with mortgage offer following, and the second profile and links to his brother's profile and credit file deleted. Following his complaint Barclays confirmed his details had changed, but no confirmation of the financial information being reverted, and the identity changed, and Barclays said he should await the start of the mortgage. Mr O said Barclays merged the profiles and the mortgage offer was ok, and the customer address updated, and his brother's account removed from his profile.

Mr O requested compensation of £10,000. Barclays apologised for its poor service and corrected his credit file and requested details of the impact. Mr O sent proof of his affected credit score and said this returned to normal in July 2024. He said his financial integrity had been compromised and not knowing about his mortgage offer whilst purchasing a property was stressful. He described the inconvenience and stress over the four-month period it took to resolve the issues. Barclays offered Mr O £350 compensation, which he declined.

Mr O referred his complaint to our service. Our investigator said Barclays amended Mr O's profile to the details for his brother to attempt to rectify the issue, but should have got his

consent beforehand. She said this caused his credit reporting to the new account, and Mr O had his brother listed as financial connections and linked addresses on his credit report.

The investigator said Barclays removed the incorrect account, financial connections and addresses from Mr O's credit report and reported to its Data Privacy Team. She said Mr O's mortgage was approved and shouldn't be affected in the future. Barclays' actions put Mr O back in the position he would have been if the mistake hadn't happened. Our investigator didn't recommend the complaint be upheld as Barclays dealt with its errors, and she thought £350 compensation is fair and reasonable for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Mr O disagreed with the investigator about the compensation being fair due to the number of faults and errors made by Barclays. He reiterated that all his details were changed without permission and his financial information was compromised and accessible to others, with an impact on his credit rating, and he received his brother's bank card and PIN.

Mr O made two long visits to the branch, with 27 emails to/from Barclays, and many phone calls and consultations with professionals. He said he'd spent *'an unfathomable number of hours of stressing & worrying - greatly affecting my mental health over the 7-month period (and still)'*. He said his legal adviser and others estimated compensation in the thousands. Mr O requested an ombudsman review his 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 was sorry to learn that what should have been a straightforward banking process has turned into a prolonged and drawn-out experience for Mr O. I'm glad to see acknowledgment by Barclays of its mistakes, which it described as a *'cross profile error'*. And I hope that it sees this complaint as an opportunity to review this part of its approach to customers.

I'm pleased that Barclays was able to fix this issue without prejudicing Mr O's mortgage application and this means the complaint now concerns the level of compensation. My role is to determine whether the compensation offered by Barclays represents a fair and reasonable recompense for Mr O's very difficult experience. And so I have looked carefully at the complaint issues and the timeline of events. If I haven't referred to everything Mr O has provided to us in his very detailed submissions it is not intended as a discourtesy, I have just tried to focus on the heart of the complaint.

In summary, the problems for Mr O related to a joint account opened for his brother, which mistakenly used Mr O's profile. This caused a negative impact on Mr O's credit file for a while and caused him stress and anxiety. Barclays corrected the issue after some missteps, by updating Mr O's records to show his name as the account holder.

When we make awards of compensation we are not looking to fine or punish a business but to find an award that fairly and reasonably compensates the consumer for the wrong that has been done. I haven't found any financial loss caused to Mr O, so I have considered the information about the impact of the events in terms of the distress and inconvenience he has been caused.

I can see that this was a very stressful and worrying time for Mr O as his mortgage adviser had said not to open any new accounts or to change his financial position. I sympathise with him for these and his other concerns when his name was linked to his brother's joint account. Mr O also explained that having his brother and brother's partner on his financial connections could have impacted his work, due to his security clearance.

I can see that Mr O was relieved when his mortgage offer was extended in May 2024, but his name was displayed on his brother's account again when he had been told this had been resolved. Following Mr O's further visit to the branch in May 2024 Barclays took steps to

revert the profile back to his details, as well as rectify the account wrongly showing in Mr O's name.

I agree with the investigator that Barclays should have done more to resolve the issue for Mr O when it first materialised. But I don't agree with Mr O there were '*lies told by Barclays in relation to resolving the situation.*' Or that his profile was '*hijacked*'. I think Barclays' member of staff made genuine errors, but the bank should have taken ownership of these issues in order to resolve them much more quickly.

Because of Barclays' slow pace, I think that Mr O was caused unwarranted stress, frustration and inconvenience in his efforts to rectify the situation and the repetitions that involved. And I can understand why he wasn't happy with a mortgage offer on his profile with someone else's identity. Mr O visited the branch and spent considerable time providing documentation, identification, and information to set up a new profile, which he had already completed with his mortgage broker. This meant that Mr O has had to remain in regular contact with Barclays.

Mr O said that his mortgage offer from Barclays was put in jeopardy. Without wishing to minimise Mr O's concerns, I haven't seen evidence that this was the case. And I'm pleased Mr O recently completed his property purchase with the Barclays' mortgage offer.

I can't see that there was a breach of data protection to Mr O when Barclays sent him his brother's bank card and PIN. It is open to Mr O's brother to complain if feels there has been a breach of his data protection. I do see the impact on Mr O's credit score of Barclays' errors. From what I have seen the issue started in March 2024 and was resolved by Barclays three months later, in June 2024. We can only consider what has actually happened rather than what might have happened and so I haven't considered any potential impact on Mr O's employment.

Having considered all the circumstances, I find the £350 compensation offered by Barclays to be about right considering the circumstances, lengthy resolution time, impact, and distress caused to Mr O. We follow our guidance in considering awards and that says awards of this amount are fair where the impact of a business's mistake has caused considerable distress, upset and worry – and/or significant inconvenience and disruption that needs a lot of extra effort to sort out. Typically, the impact lasts over many weeks or months.

Barclays' offer of compensation remains open to Mr O, and I recommend that he contacts Barclays to accept it. The amount of compensation Mr O has claimed falls into the realm of damages. Damages can only be awarded by a court and if Mr O remains of the view that this is what is due for his complaint, then he should reject this decision and take legal action against Barclays.

Mr O has been concerned that Barclays' complaint handler told him there's only one profile for him on its system, contradicting its suggestion to wait until the mortgage started to merge his two profiles. If it hasn't already, then Barclays should ensure the identification is updated following Mr O's completion of the purchase of his property and that it confirms no additional profiles remain on the systems for Mr O.

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 O to accept or reject my decision before 24 December 2024.

Andrew Fraser
Ombudsman

