

The complaint

Ms W complains that Barclays Bank UK PLC caused a data breach when her work colleagues were allowed access to her personal accounts online.

What happened

Ms W held her personal account with Barclays. She also had access to her employer's bank account which was also held with Barclays. On 27 March 2024 she found out her employer's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and other staff were able to see her personal account and her personal information online from 26 March 2024. Ms W contacted Barclays on 27 March 2024 and the matter was put right the same day.

Ms W complained to Barclays about what had happened. It acknowledged that it had linked her personal account to her employer's business account in error. It apologised and initially offered Ms W £300 but later increased this to £500 in recognition of the distress and inconvenience caused.

Ms W didn't think this went far enough to put things right, so she referred her complaint to this service. She said she'd lost confidence in Barclays to keep her information safe. She explained that she was worried about the impact of the error and how it would affect her employment. She's told us she was recently asked to reduce her working hours and alerted to the possibility of redundancies in future. She also felt this could impact her ability to seek future pay rises with her employer as they now knew personal information about her financial situation.

Our investigator looked into what had happened. And she agreed that compensation was due as Barclays had made a mistake. But while she acknowledged the seriousness of the mistake, she thought the impact was short-lived and that Barclays had rectified the underlying problem quickly when it was made aware of it. So, she thought Barclays' offer was fair.

Ms W asked for an ombudsman to review the complaint. So, it's been passed to me to decide.

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.

Having done so, I have come to the same outcome as the investigator, for much the same reasons. I know Ms W will be disappointed as I can see she feels strongly about what happened. So, I will explain why.

I think it's important to firstly explain I've read and taken into account all of the information provided by both parties, in reaching my decision. I say this as I'm aware I've summarised Ms W's complaint in considerably less detail than she has. If I've not reflected something that's been said it's not because I didn't see it, it's because I didn't deem it relevant to the

crux of the complaint. This isn't intended as a discourtesy to either party, but merely to reflect my informal role in deciding what a fair and reasonable outcome is. This also means I don't think it's necessary to get an answer, or provide my own answer, to every question raised unless I think it's relevant to the crux of the complaint.

Barclays has not disputed what happened here. But I must point out that it's not the role of this service to decide whether there's been a breach of the Data Protection Act - only the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) can do that. If Ms W wishes to complain to the ICO, there is more information on how to do this on its website.

It also isn't my role to punish businesses for making mistakes, nor can I ask a business to pay compensation for something that might have happened but didn't. What I can consider here is whether the compensation offered by Barclays fairly reflects any financial loss Ms W has incurred and/or the distress and inconvenience caused to her.

With that in mind, I can understand it would have been very worrying for Ms W to learn her CEO and other colleagues had been given online access to her personal account when this should have been restricted to her employer's business account. But as I understand there is no outstanding direct financial loss that Ms W has suffered.

So, I'm looking at the impact the error had on Ms W. I acknowledge Ms W is seeking a much higher amount of compensation than what has been offered. But an award at the level she is seeking would normally be appropriate where a business' mistakes cause sustained distress, potentially affecting someone's health, or causing severe disruption to daily life which would typically last over a very lengthy period. And I don't think what Ms W has told our service can be considered so severe.

In this case, I'm satisfied that Barclays promptly put right the underlying issue that enabled Ms W's CEO and colleagues to see her personal account and information within a day of the error being brought to its attention. And from what I've seen, there was no further impact.

I've noted Ms W's concerns about how she might now be viewed by her employer and decisions they may make in terms of increasing her salary or making redundancies. But I've not seen any persuasive evidence that shows me that her employer will be making these decisions because of this error by Barclays.

Overall, while I accept Barclays made a significant error, I find the distress caused to Ms W was short-lived. Based on everything I've seen, I think a compensation payment of £500 is a fair reflection of that impact this matter has had on Ms W.

My final decision

For the reasons mentioned above, I don't uphold this complaint.

Barclays Bank UK PLC should now pay Ms W £500 in recognition of the distress and inconvenience this matter has caused her, if it hasn't done so already.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms W to accept or reject my decision before 24 December 2024.

Jag Dhuphar
Ombudsman