

## **The complaint**

Mr S complains Nationwide Building Society (Nationwide) provided poor customer service when he asked for his packaged bank account to be closed.

## **What happened**

Mr S says at short notice he was moved overseas with his job and contacted Nationwide by webchat in mid-February 2024, to close his bank account as he no longer required the insurances and other benefits the account provided. Mr S says he contacted Nationwide several times using both online webchat and telephone and was told his only option was to visit a branch or use a card reader to authorise the account closure.

Mr S says his card reader wasn't functioning and Nationwide said it would send a replacement, but this never arrived. Mr S says it wasn't until a further phone call with a Nationwide agent in early April 2024, that he was informed he was able to switch to a non-fee-paying account via his banking app.

Mr S says Nationwide could have mentioned this to him sooner as it was clear he didn't want the account benefits any longer, after he discussed this with them in February 2024.

Mr S says he has had to pay for expensive international phone calls and spent a lot of time dealing with this matter, when it could have been sorted out when he first contacted Nationwide.

Mr S wants Nationwide to refund the bank account fees charged to his bank account and compensate him for the trouble and upset this has caused.

Nationwide says it gave the correct information to close the account and it wasn't willing to refund the account fees. Mr S wasn't happy with Nationwide's response and referred the matter to this service.

The investigator looked at all the available information and did not uphold the complaint. The investigator felt Nationwide hadn't done anything wrong as Mr S had asked to close his bank accounts and it correctly advised him he would need his card reader to facilitate that, and it offered to send a new one to his overseas address.

Mr S didn't agree with the investigator's view and asked for the complaint to be looked at in more depth and for the telephone calls he made to be listened to.

A second investigator then obtained further information from Nationwide, and following this Nationwide offered to refund the account fees for February 2024 and March 2024 totalling £26. The investigator thought this offer was fair, given it could have offered to change Mr S's bank account when he initially contacted them in February 2024.

Mr S didn't agree with the redress offered and asked for the matter to be referred to an ombudsman for a final decision.

I sent both sides a provisional decision, where I said :

*I've considered all of the evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.*

*Having done so, I will be upholding this complaint and I will explain how I have come to my decision.*

*I can understand it would have been frustrating for Mr S not to have been told sooner he could have changed his account type to avoid the monthly account fee, as he now no longer required the benefits the packaged bank account offered.*

*When looking at this complaint I will consider if Nationwide could have provided better service to Mr S when he contacted them back in February 2024, and if the redress it has now offered is sufficient here.*

*The first thing to say here is Nationwide offered to settle this complaint by agreeing to refund Mr S with two months account fees totalling £26, which would put his account back into credit.*

*Mr S doesn't feel this is sufficient and having looked at the information provided by both parties, I am sympathetic to the point Mr S makes.*

*I say this because when Mr S first contacted Nationwide in February 2024 by webchat, while he mentions he wished to close his packaged bank account, he did explain this was because he was now working abroad and the benefits on the account were no longer of use to him. I wouldn't have expected Mr S to have been aware it was possible for him to simply alter his bank account type to prevent any further monthly fees being charged.*

*It's reasonable to say Nationwide are the experts here and I am satisfied it should have made Mr S aware of that option, rather than simply considering the closure of his account as the only way forward. After all it did offer that solution in April 2024 when he telephoned them. If that had been done in February 2024, it's fair to say it would have prevented Mr S making unnecessary lengthy overseas phone calls, which would have been time consuming and inconvenient for him given he was living overseas.*

*With that in mind while Nationwide have agreed to refund the two monthly bank fees of £26, I am satisfied Mr S should also be compensated for the inconvenience this caused him and with that in mind, Nationwide should additionally pay him £100 for that.*

*While Nationwide will be disappointed with my decision here, I feel this is a fair outcome.*

Both Mr S and Nationwide responded to my provisional decision, so the case has been passed back to me to make a final decision.

### **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 gave both Mr S and Nationwide until 4 November 2024 to accept or reject my provisional decision. Nationwide have accepted my provisional decision, but Mr S doesn't feel the proposed compensation goes far enough. Mr S says he has made numerous overseas phone calls and this matter has been very stressful for him and £100 wouldn't cover his time in dealing with the matter, even if he was on national minimum wage.

While I understand the points Mr S makes here, it's worth saying this service wouldn't look to

compensate consumers for their daily hourly pay rate when a complaint like this is raised, but to consider the overall impact of any mistake made in the individual circumstances of a complaint. So here while I have agreed Nationwide could have originally provided other options to Mr S, it did agree to subsequently refund the two months bank charges to put matters right.

When looking at compensation here I should say it's not my role to punish or penalise banks when mistakes are made, but to ensure matters are put right and a proportionate amount of redress is offered. Here while Nationwide have agreed to refund two months bank charges, I didn't feel that was quite enough here, so I am satisfied an additional £100 for the trouble and upset is sufficient. So, with that in mind I can't say this changes my original provisional decision and my final decision remains the same.

While Mr S will be disappointed with my decision, I feel this is a fair outcome here.

### **Putting things right**

I instruct Nationwide Building Society to refund £26 of bank charges and in addition pay Mr S £100 for the trouble and upset caused.

### **My final decision**

My final decision is that I uphold this complaint.

I instruct Nationwide Building Society to refund £26 of bank charges and in addition pay Mr S £100 for the trouble and upset caused.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 2 December 2024.

Barry White  
**Ombudsman**