

The complaint

Mr C complains Barclays Bank UK PLC hasn't properly traced an account he believes he still holds. He wants it to find the account and pay him the funds plus interest. He's also unhappy with how it's treated him.

What happened

A summary of what happened is below.

Mr C asked staff at a Barclays branch to help him locate an old account he'd held with another business, and it had taken over in 1997. He said the account had more than £200 in it, due to him.

Staff told Mr C that he would need to complete a claim form online to trace the account. However, he explained he had a disability - after raising concerns, a manager brought out a claim form for him to complete.

The bank's tracing department then wrote to Mr C. It said it hadn't been able to locate an account with any funds in it.

Mr C wasn't happy with the outcome of its search or the service he'd received. He felt he'd been treated poorly. He said he wished to raise a complaint, but staff said he couldn't, as he wasn't a customer.

Once a complaint was logged, Barclays investigated and issued a final response. It said it had reviewed its systems and had found an account under Mr C's previous name, but its records showed this had been closed on in June 2003 with a zero balance. So, there weren't any funds to claim, and its tracing team had written out to tell him this. It accepted there had been shortcomings in the service provided, when it had said he would have to complete the claim form online and couldn't raise a complaint. To say sorry, it offered £250.

Mr C didn't think this was satisfactory. He questioned the bank's records/searches and said he wanted the funds on his account, and he wanted appropriate compensation for how he'd been treated. Dissatisfied, he referred his complaint to us.

One of our investigators was satisfied Barclays had searched for the account using the details Mr C had provided and there wasn't an open account for him, or any funds to claim. They also considered the bank's offer fair for the other issues he'd experienced. So, in the circumstances they didn't think there was much more Barclays could do.

Mr C didn't agree. He said he was shocked the investigator would think £250 was acceptable for loss of interest over 27 years. He said he'd had telephone calls with Barclays that hadn't been heard or taken into consideration. He asked that his complaint be passed to an ombudsman.

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 read and considered all of Mr C's submissions. I hope the fact that I do not respond in a similar manner will not be taken as a discourtesy, as an informal dispute resolution service, we are tasked with reaching a fair and reasonable conclusion with the minimum of formality. In doing so, it is not necessary for me to respond to every point made, but to concentrate on the crux of the issue.

I can see how important this issue is to Mr C. We can't make our own search, and our role is limited to reviewing Barclays actions in response to his complaint to see if it has responded properly.

Mr C has questioned Barclays searches, but it has given us copies of its searches showing it's checked its records. It's looked for the account using the details Mr C has provided, including his previous name, date of birth and there's only a record of one account which has been closed since 2003 with a nil balance. So, I'm satisfied Barclays don't have any money belonging to Mr C.

I must explain banks don't have to keep records of withdrawals, account closures and transfers forever. They will keep records of open accounts, even if they haven't been used for some time and become dormant. So, if there was still an account with Barclays that hadn't been closed, then I'd expect it to appear in their dormant account records. But there isn't such a record, other than a record of an account that was closed.

I'd also expect an institution to look for an account using the information it's been given and then communicate any results. I'm satisfied Barclays did that here and gave Mr C the results. Given this, there's no proper basis for me to require it to pay him any other funds (apart from those mentioned below) or do anymore.

Mr C says Barclays treated him unfairly in how it dealt with this matter. But Barclays has accepted there were some service failings. He has referenced calls, but I don't think they're necessary for the purposes of reaching a fair outcome. Because £250 is a reasonable sum, when thinking about what the bank should have done better and what it did do to trace the account and communicate its results.

My final decision

My final decision is Barclays Bank UK PLC should pay Mr C £250 (unless it has already done so). I make no other award or direction.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr C to accept or reject my decision before 6 January 2025.

Sarita Taylor
Ombudsman