

The complaint

Mr S complains about Openwork Limited trading as The Openwork Partnership (Openwork). He said Openwork didn't support him or progress his complaint about display issues with a third-party platform.

Mr S would like a full apology and compensation from Openwork.

What happened

Mr S has a stocks and shares ISA. He was a client of Newcastle Financial Advisers Ltd (NFAL) and it was through them that he held his ISA on a platform run by a company called Embark Group.

NFAL are an appointed representative for a wider partnership of financial advisers called Openwork. So, Openwork has taken responsibility for Mr S's complaint about his concerns regarding the service provided to him by NFAL. I have mentioned both Openwork and NFAL but to be clear the business that has taken responsibility for this complaint is Openwork.

Mr S signed up to be a client of NFAL and receive advice from them about his ISA portfolio. In exchange for an ongoing fee, an adviser from NFAL provided an annual report, arranged for an annual meeting and be on hand to provide him with support. Mr S paid a monthly contribution to his ISA, and his investments sat on a platform, this initially being with a company called Zurich. Mr S's ISA funds were then migrated to a platform provided by Embark Group.

In January 2022, Embark Group was acquired by Lloyds Banking Group Plc. As part of this, Embark's clients migrated over to Scottish Widow Platform's (SWP's) system and platform. For Mr S, this happened in October 2023. Mr S said it was from this point, that he began to experience problems.

Mr S said he found errors on SWP's platform, in particular to do with tax being incorrectly displayed. He said he tried to resolve matters with SWP but because of the frustrating experiences he had in trying to do this, he decided to transfer his ISA to another platform, belonging to Seven Investment Management Ltd.

Mr S said during this time, NFAL didn't resolve matters with SWP or take accountability to do so, with regards to the display issues with the latter's system. Openwork responded and said it had supported Mr S, but there was only so much it was able to do or control. It said it did not have any control over the internal processes by SWP on its investment platform. It did though, offer to refund its ongoing service fee from the point Mr S's ISA had migrated over to the SWP platform. It had calculated this to be around £69 and said it would round this up to £100.

Mr S was not happy with the response he received from Openwork or its offer of compensation and so referred his complaint to our service. An investigator looked into Mr S's complaint. He concluded he was not going to ask Openwork to do anything further.

The investigator said the capability and performance of SWP's platform, was outside of Openwork's control. He said he could see NFAL had engaged with SWP, on behalf of Mr S about the tax display issue to get an explanation for him. It also instigated the transfer of his ISA to another platform provider, were in regular communication with Mr S and offered meetings to discuss matters with him. The investigator said he could see Openwork offered to pay £100 to Mr S and thought this was reasonable. He said he wasn't going to ask it to do anymore.

Mr S was not in agreement with the investigator's view. He said he was very disappointed by his view. He said there was a lack of transparency, ownership, and accountability from Openwork. He said it's response to his complaint was brief and didn't cover all bases. He said the complaint handling by Openwork was appalling and lacked professionalism or accuracy. Mr S said he was seeking a full apology and a proportionate level of compensation for the catalogue of errors caused.

Because the parties are not in agreement, Mr S's complaint has been passed to me, an ombudsman, to look into.

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.

While I may not comment on everything raised by Mr S, I've read and considered all the evidence and arguments from both sides. This includes every email and letter sent, as well as every document submitted.

A lot has been said between the parties about the display issues on SWP's platform and NFAL's role here. I think the crux of Mr S's complaint is about the support NFAL provided when he first identified the issues to it, and what it did after this, to try and resolve matters for him, along with the support that was provided.

Mr S doesn't think NFAL did enough or take accountability for the errors on SWP's platform, that he said caused him difficulty in monitoring his investments. He said the difficulty that he encountered led him to migrate his investments to a different platform provider.

I have looked into this and can see, in particular, there was an issue where on Mr S's investments, tax was displayed, on SWP's platform. This was incorrect and Mr S then had some difficulty in trying to resolve matters. I can see how frustrating this would have been for Mr S to deal with.

The issues Mr S identified, were on SWP's platform, and for that reason, I think it was SWP's responsibility to fix them. I do agree with what has already been concluded to date, that ultimately the system display issues were not within NFAL's or Openwork's gift to be able to resolve directly.

That said, I can understand why Mr S contacted NFAL to raise concerns about the SWP platform. It was after all, his relationship with it, that led him to hold his ISA on the SWP system in the first place. So, I looked into how NFAL dealt with Mr S's concerns and considered whether its response was fair and reasonable or not. After doing so, I think it was. I can see that NFAL's representative acknowledged Mr S's concerns about the system, and when requested arranged for him to transfer his ISA to another system provider, this being Seven Investment Management Ltd.

I do think NFAL and then Openwork took responsibility for Mr S's complaint as far as it reasonably could, and he received communication over his concerns from senior management at NFAL about it. When I look at the service Mr S had signed up for with NFAL and Openwork, I don't think on balance, that there were any shortcomings that I can see here, with what Openwork did. I can see that it has looked to provide the service Mr S was paying for, and then when the issues were identified about the platform provider's system, it tried to find out answers on Mr S's behalf.

I can see Openwork offered Mr S a refund of its fees from the date his ISA migrated to the SWP system, and it rounded this refund up to £100. I think this offer is fair and reasonable in all the circumstances and tied in with the time period Mr S had identified the issues with SWP's system.

When I consider all of this, I think Openwork has taken ownership of its role in Mr S's complaint and provided a fair and reasonable response and offer of compensation. I don't think it would be fair or proportionate to ask it to do any more than it already has done. Because of this and what I have concluded, I don't uphold Mr S's complaint.

My final decision

My final decision is that I do not uphold Mr S's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 28 May 2025.

Mark Richardson
Ombudsman