

The complaint

Mr L complains about the way Nationwide Building Society ('Nationwide') dealt with a failed international money transfer.

What happened

On 15 May 2024, Mr L sent a payment of £820 from his Nationwide account to an overseas bank account. The receiving bank rejected the payment, but Mr L received back only £795. He wanted Nationwide to explain why his transfer hadn't gone through and what had happened to his missing money.

Nationwide said it hadn't done anything wrong. It said the receiving bank took charges when it sent back the rejected payment, so this was why Mr L received back less than he'd sent. And the only reason the receiving bank gave was 'unable to apply' so Mr L would need to speak to the receiving bank if he wanted more information about what had happened.

Mr L didn't feel this resolved his complaint and so he brought his complaint to us and one of our investigators looked into what happened. The investigator didn't uphold Mr L's complaint. After asking Nationwide to check with the intermediary bank it used to process international transfers, the investigator didn't think Nationwide had done anything wrong or treated Mr L unfairly. The investigator believed that the receiving bank was responsible for the missing money and said he wouldn't be asking Nationwide to do anything further. He suggested Mr L might be best to contact the receiving bank if he wanted more information.

Mr L disagreed, saying that he was disappointed with the investigator's findings and explanation. Mainly, in brief summary, he said:

- he'd spoken to Nationwide when going through the online process and been told that he didn't specifically have to choose the local currency when completing the transfer digitally.
- He was incorrectly led to think his sterling payment would be converted and the receiving bank would receive it in local currency but Nationwide had been wrong about this.
- He felt the investigator had been biased in favour of Nationwide and he didn't think it had done enough to investigate his initial complaint.
- Nationwide never informed him that the transfer had been rejected – he'd provided this information to Nationwide and it had been left to him to keep chasing for news, spending hours attempting to get clarity on why payment had been rejected and when he could expect the money to be returned.

The complaint has come to me for 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.

This includes listening to the call recordings provided.

I've carried out an independent review and having done so, I've reached the same conclusion as our investigator.

I may not address every single detail that's been mentioned and I've summarised what happened only briefly. But it doesn't mean I haven't considered the evidence and what's been said here – it just means I haven't needed to specifically refer to everything in order to reach a decision in this case.

To be clear, I have no power to investigate the receiving bank overseas as this isn't regulated in this country.

Nationwide instructed an intermediary bank to act on its behalf in carrying out the international transfer and it was entitled to do that in order to process the money transfer here. I can't see that it was unfair or unreasonable to do so, in order to give effect to Mr L's payment instructions.

It's unfortunate that Mr L's payment was rejected by the receiving bank. I can completely understand how frustrating this must have been – especially when he learned that it could take up to two weeks for his money to be returned. But Mr L was able to choose whether to send the payment in pounds sterling (to be converted by the receiving bank) or to send the money in local currency. He feels he was misled by Nationwide on this point but I haven't seen enough to show that Nationwide was to blame for the payment being rejected.

I am sorry Mr L feels let down by the way Nationwide dealt with him when the transfer didn't go through. But he knew from being in contact with the payee that there was a problem with the payment before Nationwide did – and Nationwide explained that it could take up to five working days for it to receive any communication back from the receiving bank. So when Mr L was speaking to Nationwide about where his money was, the best available information it could provide at the time was that the transfer still looked like it was going through. Nationwide suggested to Mr L that he call back the following week to check the updated position if he still hadn't received his money back after recalling it. I think that was a reasonable suggestion and there wasn't anything else Nationwide could usefully have said or done in these circumstances.

Mr L has had no explanation about why the amount refunded when he recalled the payment is less than the amount he sent. But I've seen nothing to suggest that Nationwide charged any fees for Mr L to make the transfer, or that it applied any when the money was returned. And Nationwide has provided information from its intermediary bank that confirms it didn't charge Mr L anything either. So, on balance, I am satisfied that Nationwide has provided enough information to show the receiving bank was responsible for the deduction, not Nationwide or its intermediary bank.

If Mr L wants to try and find out more information about what happened, he will need to complain to the receiving bank direct as previously advised – we can't help further with this as the receiving bank isn't within our jurisdiction.

In order to uphold Mr L's complaint, I would have to find that Nationwide made an error or acted unfairly or unreasonably. After taking into account everything that Mr L and Nationwide have told me, I haven't seen enough to show that Nationwide did anything wrong or that it treated Mr L in a way that wasn't fair and reasonable. So I can't uphold this complaint.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr L to accept or reject my decision before 15 January 2025.

Susan Webb
Ombudsman