

The complaint

Miss J complains about the way in which National Westminster Bank Plc (NatWest) handled a fraud on her account, and the resolution it offered her.

What happened

Miss J fell victim to fraud following a call from a scammer. She called NatWest on 14 June 2024 to report the call and was advised not to change her PIN but to change her phone, which she did. However, two payments totaling £41 were then taken out of her account.

On 22 June Miss J complained to NatWest about its response to her notification of the fraud call and that her card wasn't cancelled as requested. She called again to raise a claim on 23 June 2024. NatWest said the transactions were then pending, but it was able to process the refund to Miss J the next day with it arriving in Miss J's account on 26 June 2024.

NatWest said its agent's error caused the loss and meant Miss J had to contact the fraud department again. NatWest said it should have cancelled Miss J's card and advised her to come away from online banking to secure her account. NatWest apologised to Miss J that its agent hadn't followed the correct actions about the fraud, and paid her £120 compensation.

NatWest said it works hard to protect accounts from fraud, but it is important for customers to take all steps to keep their details as safe and secure as possible. NatWest directed Miss J to the security centre on its website with lots of hints and tips for keeping accounts safe.

Miss J wasn't happy with this response and referred her complaint to our service. Our investigator didn't recommend that it be upheld. He said on Miss J's call of 14 June 2024 she explained the situation but didn't provide any details about her NatWest account, she referred to a non-NatWest account where a transaction was shown. NatWest's agent said she could temporarily disable Miss J's online banking, which could later be reinstated. Miss J agreed and said she'd get a new mobile phone – no further advice came from the agent.

The investigator said NatWest could have prevented Miss J's losses of £41. This was refunded on 26 June 2024, which was a day later than it should've been. He said this was frustrating for Miss J, but he thought the apology and compensation was reasonable.

Miss J disagreed and requested an ombudsman review her complaint. She said she was away at the time and could only receive incoming calls. She said NatWest let her down and if its agent had taken her seriously she wouldn't have been left without money or banking and waiting for a new card. Miss J said she knows of people *'who have been paid more compensation for far less by NatWest where they get it for waiting too long in branch'*.

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 was sorry to learn that Miss J has been a victim of fraud. Miss J is unhappy about the poor customer service from NatWest's fraud agent and that her refund from the fraud case was applied late. She said she should be paid more compensation for what happened to her.

I am aware that Miss J also has a complaint against another bank, but here I can only consider the issues relating to NatWest.

At the time of Miss J's first call to NatWest no fraud had occurred, and if NatWest's agent had taken preventative steps, it's likely to have been avoided. It's clear that NatWest's mishandling of Miss J's initial call about potential fraud led to money being removed from her account. I am pleased that NatWest apologised to Miss J for its mistaken advice about the fraud and it has sent feedback to those concerned *'for awareness and improvement'*.

I am pleased that NatWest refunded the £41 taken from Miss J's account, albeit a day later than it said. NatWest said its agent should have asked Miss J further questions and suggested that she re-enrol on to her online banking.

Miss J said she had no access to funds from her account whilst she was away and should receive more compensation.

When we make awards of compensation we are not looking to fine or punish a business but to find an award that fairly and reasonably compensates the consumer for the wrong that has been done. I've considered the timeline of events and NatWest's handling of the case to see if the impact of the error merits a payment of further compensation than the £120 NatWest has already paid Miss J.

On the call of 14 June Miss J said *she* would obtain a new mobile phone. This was understandable in the circumstances but not a requirement from NatWest. NatWest's agent didn't tell Miss J that her bank card would be cancelled during this call, only that her online banking could be disabled as per her request.

Miss J said a subscription was stopped due to her bank card being cancelled and she had a new phone on the day of the fraud. She said the fraud happened while her new card was awaited. Miss J said she reinstated her online banking herself.

NatWest has told us that Miss J's account was not blocked, only her online banking. This means that Miss J's debit card was not cancelled, and she had access to her funds. She made transactions after her call on 14 June 2024, including on 14, 17 and 20 June 2024.

I can see from the transactions that Miss J's account wasn't used for a week at the time of the fraud, and she thinks it was blocked. However, NatWest has confirmed that Miss J's account was operable during the period, it was her online banking facility that was blocked, as stated by its agent on 14 June 2024. I am satisfied that Miss J's account was open for use at the time of this incident and she had access to funds. Miss J's online banking was disabled at her request and as she has said, this was unblocked when she reset it.

If Miss J is of the view that she suffered a financial loss through the fraud process that NatWest's followed she should provide details of the loss to NatWest in order for it to consider reimbursement.

I am sorry to learn that this problem has upset Miss J. I agree that she has been caused some frustration and inconvenience. However, not having seen details of any financial loss to Miss J, and a very short delay in refunding the payment, I find that further compensation in this case is not warranted for the distress and inconvenience incurred by Miss J. I agree with the investigator that compensation of £120 is fair and falls within our guideline in respect of, *'repeated small errors or a larger single mistake, requiring a reasonable effort to sort out'*.

Our service investigates the merits of complaints on an individual basis. And that is what I've done here. I think it's important to explain that my decision is final. I realise that Miss J will be disappointed by this outcome though I hope she appreciates the reasons why it had to be this way.

My final decision

For the reasons I have given it is my final decision that the complaint is not upheld.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss J to accept or reject my decision before 12 March 2025.

Andrew Fraser
Ombudsman