

## **The complaint**

Ms J complains Santander UK Plc is disputing the balance shown on a passbook she has recently found.

## **What happened**

Ms J explains she misplaced her passbook for a building society which was subsequently bought by Santander. She provided our service with a copy of the passbook which shows a balance of £4,483.01, with the last transaction dated on the passbook in February 2010.

After finding her passbook Ms J visited a branch of Santander which said it couldn't assist. She explained she wrote to Santander who replied, explaining the account had been closed in March 2011.

Santander explained to our service its records show the account was closed in March 2011 and the final balance of £0.27 was paid. It explained it didn't ask for passbooks to be returned and confirmed withdrawals could be made without presenting a passbook in 2011. Therefore, the existence of a passbook didn't mean the account was still open.

Santander wrote a final response letter in response to Ms J. It explained it is only required to keep records for seven years and its records do not go back far enough to provide detailed information, but confirmed the records it did have showed the account was closed.

Santander explained it has limited information due to the time that has passed. It has, however, provided our service with a screenshot of its systems confirming the platinum savings account in question was closed in March 2011.

Our investigator didn't think Santander needed to take any action. They explained they were satisfied Santander had attempted to trace the account and see whether there were outstanding funds. They thought if there had been a positive balance this would have shown. They also reiterated passbooks don't necessarily show the balance available in an account as withdrawals and closures of accounts can happen without passbooks.

Ms J responded stating she did not agree as Santander had not provided evidence of any withdrawal and maintained the funds were owed to her. She thought the recommendation has been based on probability and reiterated she had not lost her passbook. Ms J also disagreed with Santander stating withdrawals without a passbook were not allowed at the time.

As Ms J has rejected our investigator's recommendation, her complaint has been passed 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 appreciate how strongly Ms J feels about her complaint. Although I may not mention every point raised, I have considered everything but limited my findings to the areas which impact the outcome of the case. No discourtesy is intended by this, it just reflects the informal nature of our service.

Where evidence is incomplete, inconclusive or contradictory, I have to make decisions on the balance of probabilities – that is, what I consider is more likely than not to have happened in light of the available evidence and the wider surrounding circumstances.

I can see Ms J has a passbook from a building society with the last entry showing a balance on her account of £4,483.01 from over 15 years ago. I can therefore understand why she believes the account should still exist and the funds be available for withdrawal. Ms J has been clear and consistent she has not withdrawn these funds and the balance should still be available to her.

I must now balance Miss J's evidence against the evidence Santander has provided.

Santander has provided evidence from its systems which show there was a withdrawal and closure of the account later than the passbooks last entry.

Having considered the evidence Santander has provided our service, I have no reason to doubt Santander has exhausted its processes for tracing her account and establish whether there is any outstanding balance. I think it more likely than not, had the funds not been claimed as Santander has suggested, the account and outstanding balance would have shown on its systems.

To help explain my decision, I would like to provide some further context. Passbooks are not, in themselves, evidence of funds. Transactions can occur which are not recorded on passbooks. For example, passbooks can be lost and found at a later date or reissued, so in some cases two or more passbooks can exist for the same account.

Account holders are entitled to access their money, so many organisations allowed withdrawals without passbooks or closed accounts without retrieving passbooks, as Santander explained it did. Passbooks can therefore only be considered as a 'snap-shot' in time for the date they were last completed - and not necessarily conclusive evidence of current funds.

I appreciate the comments Ms J made concerning the lack of evidence regarding any withdrawal. However, financial businesses aren't required to keep records indefinitely. Because of the amount of time that has passed, I think it unlikely Santander would be able to produce evidence of a withdrawal Ms J has requested. I am, however, satisfied Santander has been able to show the date the account closed and some activity on the account.

For these reasons, in response to the points made by Ms J, I do not find it unreasonable or unusual Santander have not been able to provide specific evidence in relation to withdrawals made some 15 years ago.

Based on the time frames involved, the arguments given, the evidence presented and the points I have made above, I don't think on the balance of probabilities, there's enough evidence to instruct Santander to pay the funds showing on the passbook. I therefore do not uphold this complaint.

I appreciate this will be disappointing to Ms J and I would like to assure her I am sympathetic to her position.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons I have given, my final decision is I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms J to accept or reject my decision before 16 April 2025.

Gareth Jones  
**Ombudsman**