

The complaint

Mr S complains Experian Limited are reporting incorrect information about him on his credit file.

What happened

Mr S says he entered an arrangement to pay with his mortgage company, who I'll refer to as Company A, but noticed several Credit Reference Agencies (CRA's) (including Experian) were incorrectly reporting missed payments. He contacted A, who he says told him they'd made an error but would contact the CRA's to correct this.

Mr S says other CRA's updated his credit file to reflect the correct payment information, but Experian didn't. He also says Experian held two separate accounts for him, with different credit scores so he contacted Experian to complain.

Experian reviewed matters and raised a dispute with A, but they didn't give consent for Experian to remove or update the information. Experian did however find Mr S had two accounts with them, under separate email addresses. They said one account didn't reflect a previous address – which explained the conflicting credit scores. To resolve matters, Experian merged Mr S' accounts but said they hadn't acted unfairly and reiterated that without A's consent they were unable to update the information they held.

Unhappy, Mr S complained to this Service about Experian, saying he'd been declined for a mortgage as a result of this incorrect information. An Investigator here reviewed matters but concluded Experian hadn't acted unfairly, saying as they weren't the data owners – A were – Experian couldn't do anything further without their consent. They also said Experian had resolved matters by merging the two accounts Mr S held with them.

Mr S remained unhappy and provided evidence from a third-party credit reference platform to show Experian were recording missed payments, whereas other CRA's were recording an arrangement to pay. Our Investigator put this to Experian who confirmed there was an arrangement flag on Mr S' account, but they could only record data in the way A provided it and as A hadn't consented, this couldn't be changed.

Our Investigator reviewed everything again, but concluded their outcome remained the same.

Mr S considered the missed payments Experian were reporting had a greater detriment to his credit file than the arrangement to pay other CRA's reported – and ultimately said he hadn't missed any payments. He also added Experian had failed to raise his disputes with A and weren't responding to his emails.

As an agreement hasn't been reached, the case has been passed to me to decide.

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.

In doing so, I've taken into account the relevant industry rules and guidance, and what would be considered as good industry practice.

I should say this decision will only consider the actions of Experian – not those of any other third-party, such as A, other CRA's or credit reference platforms. I say that because I'm aware Mr S has also raised a complaint with A and this Service. As well as concerns other CRA's are reporting his information differently to Experian - but that isn't something I can consider as part of this complaint.

Information on Mr S' credit file

As our Investigator explained, Experian don't own the data they report on - the data is owned by lenders, third-party companies and other organisations. The responsibility of reporting accurate and up to date information therefore rests mainly in the hands of the data providers. CRA's, such as Experian, don't actively approach data providers for information, rather they are sent to the CRA in a data package for them to report. CRA's then report whatever information they have been given.

Not owning the data also means Experian aren't generally responsible for the data provided but must take reasonable steps to ensure it is accurate, and investigate when a dispute is raised. Experian did that here and raised a dispute with A, shortly after Mr S raised it, asking whether the information displayed, particularly in relation to how the data was being reported, could be corrected. But A didn't provide its consent for Experian to do so.

Following this, Mr S raised several disputes with Experian about this issue and on each occasion, I can see they raised his dispute with A, as I'd expect. This included his concerns the data was being recorded as missed payments, other CRA's were reporting the data differently, as well as incorrect settlement and arrangement dates. But on each occasion A responded explaining Mr S would need to contact them directly and didn't give Experian consent to make changes. I've seen Experian shared A's responses with Mr S, and as such, there isn't anything further Experian can do here.

Even though Mr S disputes the way in which Experian present the data is correct, that doesn't mean Experian are able to amend it. It also means, in future, if it's found A have made an error, Experian wouldn't have acted incorrectly by reporting this data in the way they have previously. That's because, as explained, they can only report on information they've been given by lenders and other third-party companies. And as it currently stands, A haven't provided consent for Experian to remove this.

This also means Experian aren't required to investigate matters further. It's reasonable for them to take the data owners response and apply it, as they have done here.

I understand Mr S has provided evidence from a third-party credit reference platform which shows Experian are reporting "5" (five missed payments), whereas other CRA's are reporting "AR" (arrangement). While I can't comment on the data other CRA's are reporting or how it's presented by the credit reference platform, Experian have confirmed an arrangement flag is on Mr S' account – which lenders can see.

I think it also might be helpful to explain, although the account is now settled, Experian are required to reflect the history of how an account has been used and any repayments made, for up to six years after the date of the event. As such, it's reasonable for Experian to detail Mr S' account history, even though it was settled in October 2024.

Given A haven't provided Experian consent to update the information they hold, even though Mr S disputes it, I can't say Experian have made an error here. That's because I can see they've raised disputes with A, but haven't been given consent to remove these and they have added an arrangement flag to his account.

Two separate accounts

Experian explained Mr S initially held two accounts with them as he'd used different email addresses. These had conflicting credit scores, as Mr S' previous address hadn't been linked to one account. I understand these have now been merged and Mr S has just one account.

Since then, Mr S hasn't raised any further concern about this issue, so on this point all I will say is that Experian have done as I'd expect and merged the accounts when Mr S brought it to their attention. It also doesn't seem unreasonable two accounts had been set up, as he'd used different email addresses. So I don't think Experian acted unfairly here either.

It might however be helpful to explain a credit score is simply a numerical figure that can be used to give some general comprehension of whether your credit record is in a good place, or not. The score will fluctuate regularly, based on various factors, including among other things, the balance held on credit accounts when the score is generated, or the amount of available credit being used. Lenders don't see this score – it's simply an indication of how a potential lender may view an individual's credit rating, rather than a formal assessment. Instead, lenders use data from credit reference agencies such as Experian, along with information the applicant has provided to assess a credit application, using their own systems.

Application decline

Mr S says he applied for a mortgage with several lenders, but was declined. He's provided evidence from those lenders that explain Mr S didn't meet their various lending criteria.

Mr S considered the information Experian are reporting – to say he missed payments, rather than was in an arrangement to pay – has caused this. Fundamentally, in order to uphold this aspect of Mr S' complaint, I'd need to be satisfied Experian had made an error and were solely or mainly responsible for Mr S being declined for credit. I've already set out above why I'm satisfied Experian haven't made an error and in respect of Experian being solely or mainly responsible for Mr S being declined credit, I'd want something from the lender to explain Experian's incorrect information was the sole reason for this. While the evidence Mr S has provided mentions CRA checks generally, it isn't specific about what aspect of Mr S' report caused the decline. The key reason for this is I know lenders decide on whether they are willing to provide a consumer credit using a vast number of different factors. So it's extremely difficult to apportion sole responsibility to Experian in such circumstances when there is a real and realistic possibility several factors contributed to Mr S being declined. Especially given Mr S was in an arrangement to pay, even though I understand he's been told missed payments cause more detriment.

On balance, I can't fairly conclude the way Mr S data was presented by Experian was the reason his mortgage applications were declined. And in any case, as I've explained, Experian are only reporting the information A has given them, so I can't say they've made an error here either.

Customer service

For completeness, I'm also aware Mr S has now said he's unhappy with the service he's

received from Experian – particularly that they haven't responded to emails or evidenced that they've raised a dispute each time he's asked.

While I understand this is frustrating, here Experian correctly raised numerous disputes with A. Given this, I think it's reasonable for Experian to tell Mr S, as they have done, there is nothing further they are able to do – without any consent from A. And while Mr S is unhappy with the response, I can't ask them to do anything further for the reasons explained above.

I appreciate this will come as a disappointment to Mr S, but based on what I've seen Experian haven't acted unfairly. They raised multiple disputes about the data they held and did so quickly, each time Mr S raised concerns. But the responses they received from A didn't allow them to amend this.

My final decision

For the reasons I've set out above, I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 5 June 2025.

Victoria Cheyne
Ombudsman