

The complaint

Mr S was unhappy that Starling Bank Limited ('Starling') had not removed a restriction on his account after he'd sent information to enable it to do this and he complained about the service provided during a phone call on 16 January 2025 when he called Starling about the matter.

What happened

Mr S' account was restricted in September 2024 after a debit card Starling sent to Mr S through the post was returned undelivered. Starling asked Mr S to confirm it held the correct address for him and to provide proof of address so the restriction could be lifted.

Starling sent a reminder about this to Mr S in October 2024, confirming that his account would remain restricted until he provided a valid form of proof of address.

Mr S provided proof of address on 10 January 2025, but Starling failed to action this until he phoned Starling on 16 January 2025 to find out why his account was still restricted. Mr S objected to the way the call handler dealt with him on the phone and complained.

Starling didn't agree that the call handler had treated Mr S unfairly or unreasonably. But Starling agreed that it had unduly delayed reviewing the proof of address document he'd provided and that it should've lifted the restriction on his account sooner. It also identified some poor service in relation to a compensation offer that Mr S was informed would be paid into the account – even though the account was restricted at the time.

Starling said it was sorry about the poor service identified and told Mr S it would pay him £80 compensation.

When Mr S brought his complaint to us, our investigator thought Starling had done enough to put things right and didn't recommend any further action.

Mr S strongly disagreed. In brief summary, he felt the investigator hadn't considered the full facts or taken into consideration everything he'd told us about things that had gone wrong in his dealings with Starling. His complaint comes 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.

Having reviewed everything, including listening to the call recordings provided, I agree with the investigator that the £80 compensation already paid by Starling is reasonable to put things right. I will explain why I say this.

We provide an informal complaint handling service. My role is to consider the evidence presented by the parties and reach an independent, fair and reasonable decision based on the facts of the case and the evidence provided by both sides. I've briefly summarised and expressed in my own words what seem to me to be Mr S' main concern and my focus is on what I think are the key issues here. Our rules allow me to do this and this approach simply reflects the informal nature of our service. If I haven't addressed everything mentioned by Mr S, 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 it in order to reach a decision in this case.

Just to be clear, I am aware that Mr S has other complaints about Starling but these are dealt with elsewhere. I've reviewed these to help me understand the wider issues here. But each complaint is looked at on its own merits and my decision concerns the specific complaint issues he first raised on 16 January 2025.

I'm sorry that this was such an upsetting experience for Mr S. In order to uphold this complaint I would have to find that Starling didn't treat Mr S in a fair and reasonable way overall after he phoned on 16 January 2025. So I've made this the main focus of my decision.

Starling agreed that it should've acted sooner to lift the restriction on Mr S' account. So I don't need to say much more about this as Starling has admitted to poor service in this regard. But I've taken this into account when thinking about what redress is fair and reasonable and I will say more about this below.

Mr S main complaint seems to me to concern his experience on the phone when he called Starling on 16 January 2025. He told us, amongst other things, that the call handler at Starling didn't give him any answers when he phoned up. He said the call handler put him on hold three times and ultimately put the phone down on him, disregarding the fact that Mr S had explained he had a disability that meant he would need to take time off from the call every half hour or so.

I've listened carefully to the call recording to better understand what happened when Mr S called Starling on 16 January 2025. During the call Mr S complained about being interrupted by the call handler. But it sounds to me like the call handler was simply trying his best to address Mr S' questions and concerns and that was sometimes difficult when Mr S interjected with comments or further questions.

The call handler explained to Mr S that he'd needed to go on hold the first time so that he could verify security before discussing the account with Mr S. The second time, the call handler explained that he wasn't able to remove the restriction himself but he would put Mr S on hold while he referred Mr S' request for the restriction to be removed to the team that could do this for him. Despite Mr S objecting to this, I don't think that was unreasonable. This was how the call handler needed to deal with Mr S' request for the restriction to be removed – he couldn't do this for Mr S any other way.

The third time Mr S was on hold was at his request when he needed to step away from the call. This happened around 21 minutes into the call. The call handler remained on the line, checking from time to time to see if Mr S had returned to the call. After almost half an hour, and a final check to see if Mr S was back on the line, the call handler terminated the call.

I don't consider that was unreasonable. Whilst Mr S had advised the call handler he would likely need to take a break, he hadn't given any indication that he was likely to be away as long as he was. The call handler waited for what I consider to be ample time for Mr S to return to the call. In his dealings with Mr S I find that the call handler was throughout measured, calm and professional. He patiently repeated information for Mr S when Mr S appeared not to understand or accept what he was being told. All in all, I don't consider that the service provided by the call handler fell short of the standard of service I'd reasonably expect Starling to provide.

But it's agreed that Starling failed to do what it should've done when it didn't act sooner on the proof of address information provided by Mr S. So I've thought about fair and reasonable compensation in this situation.

I haven't been provided with anything to show that Mr S is out of pocket as a result of any poor service on the part of Starling. But I don't doubt that Starling's admitted poor service was frustrating for Mr S. Nonetheless, it doesn't automatically mean that a larger compensation payment is due from Starling. I've taken into account that his debit card was returned to Starling some months before Mr S provided the necessary proof of address. Starling's admitted delay added less than a week to the time it took overall for the restriction on Mr S' account to be removed. So Starling's poor service had limited overall impact on Mr S being able to use his account again.

In these circumstances, I think the £80 compensation paid by Starling is fair and reasonable. It fairly reflects the distress caused and the trouble Mr S was put to as a result of Starling's admitted service failings. Beyond this, I don't agree that Mr S' experience with Starling warrants further compensation. I am satisfied that £80 matches the level of award I would make in these circumstances had it not already been paid. It is in line with the amount this service would award in similar cases, and it is fair compensation for Starling to pay Mr S in his particular situation.

So, looked at overall, I am satisfied that Starling has already taken responsibility for addressing shortcomings it identified on its part and done enough to put this right.

My final decision

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint as I am satisfied that Starling Bank Limited has already paid Mr S fair redress in respect of this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 26 May 2025.

Susan Webb
Ombudsman