

The complaint

Mr H complains that Experian Limited (Experian) didn't investigate properly or remove an incorrect entry on his credit file when he disputed it with them.

What happened

Mr H noticed an entry on his credit file showing both payments made and payments missed, for a utility company I'll call U for the purposes of this decision. Mr H believed this was incorrect as he didn't have an account with U and so he raised a dispute with Experian.

Experian raised a dispute with U on Mr H's behalf and waited for U's response. U responded saying the entry was correct and should remain on the file. Experian passed this information to Mr H and closed the dispute; however, they did place a notice on Mr H's credit file saying that Mr H was in dispute with U.

Sometime after this U updated the record removing it from Mr H's credit file.

Mr H was unhappy with the process Experian had followed and believed they had failed to investigate the matter and so made a complaint to them. Experian didn't uphold Mr H's complaint, they said they had followed the correct process and met their obligations to Mr H.

Mr H remained unhappy and so brought his complaint to our service. Our investigator didn't uphold Mr H's complaint, in summary they said:

U were the data owners and Experian couldn't remove the entry without U's permission. When Mr H disputed the entry Experian's obligation was to act promptly to verify the information they were displaying, and they did this by raising the dispute with U on the same day Mr H raised it with them. And so, there was nothing more they could have done to help Mr H.

Mr H disagreed; he said Experian had an obligation to investigate his dispute more thoroughly. He argued that they could have asked for evidence from his bank to show that he had never made payments to U and so the record had been fabricated.

As no agreement was reached the matter 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.

I realise that I've summarised this complaint in less detail than the parties and I've done so using my own words. I've concentrated on what I consider to be the key issues. The rules that govern this service allow me to do so. This isn't intended as a discourtesy to either party, but merely to reflect my informal role in deciding what a fair and reasonable outcome is. This also means I don't think it's necessary to get an answer, or provide my own answer, to every question raised unless it's relevant to the crux of the complaint.

Mr H has shared with us the effect that the entry U placed on his credit file has had on him, both personally and professionally. And I'd like to express how sorry I am to hear what a difficult time he has been having.

Mr H has listed various rules, regulations and legislation when constructing his argument for why Experian has acted unfairly when dealing with his dispute. I'm not going to list them all again here, but I am going to explain why I don't agree.

Experian aren't responsible for the information, that lies with the business that has supplied it – in this case U. But they have to take reasonable measures to ensure the information they report is correct. Reasonable measures could be making sure the name and address and date of birth on the entry match that of the person whose file it is being added to for example. In this case the entry U had made matched Mr H's details, so I'm satisfied there was no obvious reason for Experian to believe the information wasn't correct.

When a person disputes an entry, as Mr H did here Experian has a duty to investigate that. Mr H has argued Experian didn't do this and I think that is because what he understands an investigation to be isn't what happened, I'll explain.

What Experian needed to do here was raise the dispute with U and ask them to confirm if the information they were providing was correct or if it could be removed. And they needed to do this promptly. I can see that Experian raised the dispute almost immediately with U and they received an answer within two days. The answer was that the entry was valid according to U. Experian were entitled to rely on that information because U are the ones responsible for the data as they own it.

I appreciate Mr H thinks that Experian need to interrogate evidence and has suggested they could have asked for information from his bank to show he had never made payments to U and so this would prove the record couldn't be right. However, that is not what is expected of them and its not practical because even if they wanted to do that, they wouldn't have the power to compel any other businesses to provide cooperate or information to them to do so.

I do accept the word "investigation" might lead someone to believe more would be done but it really is as simple as asking the data owner if the entry is correct.

Experian can't remove data without U's permission and as U didn't give it, I can't see that they could have done anything differently here. And so it follows I won't be asking them to do any more to resolve things for Mr H in these circumstances.

I know Mr H will be disappointed with this outcome. But my decision ends what we – in trying to resolve his dispute with Experian– can do for him.

My final decision

For the reasons set out above, my final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr H to accept or reject my decision before 25 July 2025.

Amber Mortimer
Ombudsman