DRN-5606034

The complaint

Mr A is unhappy with the service he's received from National Westminster Bank Public Limited Company ("NatWest").

What happened

Mr A received several suspicious calls and emails regarding his NatWest account and so visited a local NatWest branch and asked for confirmation that his account was secure. However, rather than conducting a security review of his account, NatWest's branch staff undertook a general account review instead, which Mr A felt was used as an opportunity to try to sell further NatWest products to him.

As part of this review, NatWest's branch staff noted that Mr A had a partially completed credit card application that had lapsed and encouraged Mr A to proceed with a new application. Mr A agreed to do so, and after completing a preliminary credit check a credit account with a specific interest rate was offered to him.

Mr A asked NatWest's agent whether a hard credit search had been undertaken at that time and was told that it had been. Because of this, Mr A decided to formally apply for the credit card account, even though he wasn't fully satisfied with the product or the interest rate offered. However, Mr A later understood that a hard credit search hadn't been carried out when he'd asked about it, and he felt that NatWest's branch staff had coerced him into going through with the credit account application as a result.

Some time later, Mr A found that the email address he had registered with NatWest had been compromised and he went back into branch to update his email address and ask what steps he could take to protect the security of his account. NatWest's staff didn't offer any advice on how he could protect his account. Mr A wasn't happy about this, and he felt that it was another example of NatWest not taking his account security concerns seriously. So, he raised a complaint.

NatWest responded to Mr A and upheld his complaint. They acknowledged that Mr A received poor service when he raised his security concerns in branch and that it had been inappropriate for their staff member to have processed a new account application.

NatWest apologised to Mr A for what had happened and paid £500 compensation to him. NatWest also closed the credit card application and removed the hard credit search that had taken place from Mr A's credit file. Finally, NatWest paid a further £240 to cover six months of interest on Mr A's existing credit card account that he held with another bank. Mr A wasn't satisfied with NatWest's response, so he referred his complaint to this service.

One of our investigators looked at this complaint. They felt that NatWest had provided poor service to Mr A but felt that the compensation and corrective action that NatWest had provided to Mr A already represented a fair resolution to this complaint. Mr A didn't agree, and so the matter was escalated to an ombudsman for 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.

Having done so, while it's clear that NatWest could and reasonably should have provided a better standard of service to Mr A here, I feel that the £500 compensation payment, £240 external account interest reimbursement, and further corrective action undertaken by NatWest, already provides a fair outcome to this complaint. Accordingly, I won't be upholding this complaint or instructing NatWest to do anything further.

It should be noted that while I feel that NatWest's branch staff should have been more receptive and understanding regarding Mr A's account security concerns and shouldn't have focussed on a credit account application at that time, there are some aspects of Mr A's dissatisfaction which I don't feel that NatWest should fairly be considered accountable or responsible for.

For instance, Mr A has said that he was incorrectly told by NatWest's staff member that a hard credit search had already been undertaken, and that it was this that caused him to proceed with the formal account application, even though he wasn't fully satisfied with the product. But I don't feel that it reasonably follows that because Mr A was told that a hard credit search had been undertaken that he therefore had to continue with the application process. Instead, if Mr A wasn't fully satisfied with the product, then I feel that it was for him to have stopped the application process at that time, regardless as to whether he believed a hard credit search had been undertaken or not.

Additionally, I'm not convinced that it's for NatWest's branch staff to have told Mr A about protective measures he could take with companies external to NatWest, such as the credit reference agencies directly. And this is especially the case given that Mr A has later complained that protective measures he did later take with credit reference agencies directly has caused him inconvenience.

Mr A feels that NatWest's lack of concern and advice has contributed to the prolonged cyber-attacks that he has experienced. But I'm not convinced by Mr A's position here, given that there's no suggestion or evidence that NatWest are directly responsible for the attacks that Mr A has incurred.

Mr A has also said that NatWest's lack of concern about his account security caused him to believe there was nothing to worry about. But I feel that if Mr A was concerned that he may have been targeted by fraudsters, who could have targeted any aspect of Mr A's affairs and not just his NatWest accounts, then I would reasonably have expected him to have undertaken further research into what protective measures he could take himself. And I don't feel that it's reasonable for Mr A to have expected NatWest to have provided him with a financial security service to the extent that he implies here.

All of which isn't to say that Mr A didn't receive unfair service from NatWest, and as explained above, I feel that their staff members should have provided a better standard of service in response to Mr A's security concerns, including confirming to Mr A whether there was or was not any suspicious activity on his accounts. But as explained, I feel that Mr A's expectations regarding the level of service that NatWest should have provided aren't reasonable, and I feel that NatWest have already provided fair compensation and undertaken appropriate corrective action for the poor service that I feel they are accountable for, such that a fair outcome to this complaint has already been reached.

In taking this position, I've considered the impact of the poor service for which I feel NatWest should be considered responsible on Mr A, as well as the general framework this service uses when assessing compensation amounts, details of which are available on this service's website. And, having done so, I confirm that the payment of £500 compensation and the £240 interest reimbursement are at least commensurate, and potentially more, than I would have instructed NatWest to have paid to Mr A here, had they not already done so.

I realise this won't be the outcome that Mr A was wanting, but it follows that I won't be upholding this complaint or instructing NatWest to take any further or alternative action. I hope that Mr A will understand, given what I've explained, why I've made the final decision that I have.

My final decision

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 A to accept or reject my decision before 6 August 2025.

Paul Cooper
Ombudsman