

## **The complaint**

Ms J complains that National Savings and Investments (NS & I) blocked her savings account for several months, causing her great difficulty.

## **What happened**

Ms J says that she called NS & I in October 2024 to inquire about submitting a signature sample to keep her record up to date, and to change her designated bank account details. She says that she couldn't remember her registered e-mail address and later found out that her account had been blocked. NS & I said this was for security reasons. She asked for her nephew, Mr S to represent her. NS & I said that she could only do this if she appointed him under a power of attorney.

Ms J's account continued to be blocked and she wrote several emails asking for updates, to which she only received acknowledgments. In January 2025 she sent a letter advising of a change of address to an overseas one. She asked for correspondence by e-mail and said that she would be registering a power of attorney in respect of Mr S.

NS & I continued to block the account for security reasons, and said that for the same reasons it couldn't deal with Ms J's complaints as it wasn't convinced that the correspondence was from Ms J.

On referral to the Financial Ombudsman Service our Investigator said that NS & I had acted fairly and could only proceed if it received the necessary legal documents (for Mr S to act).

After reviewing the case with its fraud team, NS & I advised us on 29 May that it had unblocked the account and no longer had security concerns. It emphasised however that Mr S could only act for Ms J in respect of the account under a power of attorney.

The matter has been referred to me for an Ombudsman's consideration.

## **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.

First of all, I fully understand Ms J's concern that her account which had substantial funds in it, was blocked for so long. From the information supplied to us by NS & I the account wasn't blocked because the wrong e-mail address was given to it on the phone call in October 2024. Following activity in respect of the account on behalf of Ms J in October 2024 NS & I was sufficiently concerned about the account to block it due to security concerns. This put NS & I in a difficult position, because if it unblocked the account and then money was removed from it without Ms J's knowledge that would have caused her far more difficulty than keeping it blocked until it could be satisfied that only Ms J, or someone she appointed legally, had access to the account.

On the face of it, a failure to address a consumer's complaint is a serious matter. And I can

see that Ms J would have been very frustrated about it. However I'm satisfied that the security concerns which led to the blocking of the account also prevented NS & I from addressing her complaint. As it couldn't be sure it was directly in contact with Ms J. So its request that if she wanted Mr S to act for her, she should provide a power of attorney was in my view reasonable. Whilst I understand that Ms J now says she can operate the online account herself, she did write to NS & I to say that she would be obtaining the power of attorney.

Ms J approached this Service because she wanted to get her account unblocked. And, once we got in touch with NS & I, it was able to communicate through us with Ms J. And this has meant that it was able to unblock the account after carrying out further investigations.

As Ms J has achieved the unblocking of her account, this does in my view resolve the complaint she made to this Service. I don't think any further directions to NS & I are necessary. Though we have the power to award compensation, I won't do so as I think that NS & I has shown that blocking the account was a reasonable step to take. And that because of its security concerns, meaningful communication with Ms J was not possible.

### **My final decision**

I don't uphold the complaint.

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

Ray Lawley  
**Ombudsman**