

The complaint

Miss S complains that National Westminster Bank PLC (NatWest) provided her with incorrect information on their website about how to close a savings account.

What happened

Miss S said the website instructed customers to use online banking, specifically to go to 'My Accounts', select 'Account details' and choose 'Close my account'. But no such option was available, which she said caused significant distress, confusion and was time-consuming. Miss S said she relied on the instructions to close her account and had transferred the remaining balance to another account. But was left uncertain about her funds and account.

Miss S said NatWest sent an automated acknowledgment to her complaint, but no response over the following three months. She said this caused her anxiety and disrupted her financial planning, and she referred her complaint to our service. Miss S wanted NatWest to close her account and apologise for misinformation on its website and its failure to respond, and pay appropriate compensation for the distress, and inconvenience - she said £300 would be fair.

In its response, NatWest explained that if the 'Close my account' option isn't showing, *'it may be to do with your internet settings, or the web browser you're using'*. In this situation NatWest said customers can send it a secure message or call its customer service team who can action the closure. NatWest said there were no errors concerning account closure, and asked Miss S to contact its Customer Services to have this resolved.

Subsequently, NatWest said it had seen an automated response to Miss S's complaint. It said her message hadn't completed correctly and wasn't shown on her profile due to a system error, and so no response was provided. NatWest apologised, and for the complaint handler not recognising and dismissing the complaint in its initial response. NatWest felt that £300 is excessive compensation but offered £75 as an apology for the poor service.

Miss S said NatWest's admission of a system error was false and contradicted its previous statement and was either incompetent record checking or deliberate misrepresentation. She rejected £75 as inadequate for ignoring her request to close her account for several months and the misleading website instructions. And for causing her to bring her complaint to our service. She requested an explanation of what happened and a written apology.

Our investigator didn't recommend the complaint be upheld. She said NatWest's account closure instructions are correct and may not have showed due to Miss S's settings. She said Miss S's message didn't arrive on its system, but an automated response was sent. She agreed there was an error in NatWest not receiving the closure request which was frustrating for Miss S, but there were no further communication attempts by Miss S about her complaint.

The investigator said Miss S still wants to close her account and this can be done via telephone instead. The investigator suggested the bank contact Miss S to action the closure and pay the offer of £75 compensation for the poor customer service to Miss S.

Miss S disagreed with the investigator and requested an ombudsman review her complaint.

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 can see that Miss S withdrew her funds in anticipation of the closure of her account. I was sorry to learn that what should have been a straightforward closure process has turned into a prolonged and frustrating experience for Miss S. My role is to determine whether what took place was fair and reasonable and whether NatWest followed the process correctly.

I have seen NatWest's process for the closure of customer accounts, and it is clear that this is possible via online banking and for customers who call NatWest's customer services. Many customers are able to close their accounts online and so it seems likely that NatWest has correctly explained that Miss S's internet settings, or the web browser may have prevented the closure pathway from showing.

NatWest's process concerning the closure of accounts is in common with the other banks and appears to be accessible and reasonable from what I have seen. Certainly, I have not seen other complaints of this nature.

I can see from NatWest's comments that it does not consider Miss S's message about her complaint to have been completed in some way that prevented it showing on its system. However, it acknowledges that it has a log of a text message being sent to Miss S confirming receipt of the message.

I agree with Miss S that NatWest's text message proves that her complaint was received by NatWest's system. But I disagree with her that the bank's claim of a 'system error is therefore another false statement'. It appears there was a system error that prevented the complaint being correctly logged, and unfortunately this wasn't identified by the bank's staff.

It's not clear to me why NatWest's complaint handler did not identify and respond to Miss S's complaint message. And it's not clear to me why Miss S didn't follow up with NatWest on her complaint when no response was received. However, I don't think there was a financial detriment to Miss S for the delay in her complaint being considered although I agree there has been some inconvenience caused to her.

Miss S requested a formal apology from the bank. I'm pleased that NatWest has acknowledged the frustration caused to Miss S in the lack of response to her complaint and apologised. NatWest has also apologised that its complaint handler didn't pick up on this fact during the complaint handling process.

NatWest has confirmed that Miss S's account remains open with a small balance of funds. The bank says it still requires Miss S to call to action the closure and provide account details for the balance to be paid to.

Putting things right

In conclusion, I think there was a system error in Miss S's complaint not being logged correctly by NatWest and that it should not have dismissed this part of her complaint when it was reviewed. All in all, I think the £75 compensation offered by NatWest is about right for the impact of the poor service Miss S received. In deciding fair and reasonable compensation I have taken into consideration Miss S's distress and inconvenience and our guidance on awards.

My final decision

For the reasons I have given it is my final decision that the complaint is upheld. If accepted by Miss S, I require National Westminster Bank PLC to pay her £75 compensation.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss S to accept or reject my decision before 28 October 2025.

Andrew Fraser
Ombudsman