

The complaint

The estate of Mrs O complains about Barclays Bank UK PLC (Barclays) when it approached them about several historic bank accounts. The complaint has been brought on behalf of the estate by a third party who I'll refer to as C for ease of reading.

What happened

In 2024, as part of the administration of the estate, C located passbooks from a financial institution which was later taken over by Barclays. C approached Barclays about the accounts and as some of the records that C provided dated back nearly 20 years, C asked Barclays to trace the accounts.

Barclays located accounts but were unable to find one which according to the passbook, held a balance of over £100,000.

C brought the issue to our service but as Barclays had not been given the opportunity to investigate this as a complaint, following our process, our service raised the complaint with Barclays who investigated the matter. Barclays said that three accounts were transferred to them from the previous provider, and provided balances of each, but said they could not locate an account with a balance of over £100,000 i.e. the account in question.

Remaining unhappy with Barclays' response, C asked our service to investigate, saying Barclays should be able to locate this account, that the passbook proves the balance, and furthermore, no withdrawals had been made.

Once Grant of Probate had been obtained, our investigator looked into the complaint and issued their view in which they thought Barclays didn't need to take any further action. Our investigator was satisfied that Barclays had made sufficient efforts in attempting to trace the account, that it was not unreasonable that Barclays could not find the account - given their six-year record retention policy - and that it was likely the funds were withdrawn before the account was migrated over to Barclays.

C rejected our investigator's view unhappy that the investigator's opinion was that the account was closed even though C had the passbook and there was no evidence of closure. As a result, the complaint has been passed to me as an Ombudsman.

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 have looked at the information Barclays has supplied to see if it has acted within its terms and conditions and to see if it has treated C fairly.

If I don't mention any specific point, it's not because I failed to take it on board and think about it, but because I don't think I need to comment on it to reach what I think is a fair and reasonable outcome. No discourtesy is intended by me in taking this approach.

I empathise with C's frustration here in terms of what they perceive as Barclays either not wanting to give the money back or explain what happened to it, due to the records they keep. As our investigator mentioned, banks such as Barclays aren't obliged to hold information for longer than six years, as per General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) rules. This is a regulation, amongst many important legal and regulatory obligations it must meet when providing accounts to customers, rather than any reluctance on Barclays's part to return, or explain what happened to the funds.

Financial businesses aren't required to keep a record indefinitely. So, we often find that information about historic accounts can be very limited. In view of the length of time that has passed since the last entry in the passbook, I agree with the investigator that it's not reasonable to expect Barclays to be able to provide a trail of any passbook movements. Where a business can't locate an account, I'd expect them to demonstrate they have carried out all the necessary searches, and here, I've seen sufficient evidence to show Barclays have exhausted their efforts.

Regrettably with passbooks, transactions can take place without one, so whilst I agree that the passbook C supplied does represent evidence, it only represents that until a certain date.

I agree with the investigator that it's likely that the account was closed, and the balance, wholly or in part, was withdrawn at a date, or dates after the last recorded entry in the passbooks. This is supported by Barclays' testimony that the original account number held with the previous provider, did not generate a Barclays account number after migration. I have also carefully looked over C's submissions connected to this regard, in which they provided information such as family money conversations, living habits, and money movements. I thank C for this background however it doesn't materially affect my decision.

Overall whilst I can't conclude in these circumstances exactly what happened to the account in question, I am satisfied Barclays have made extensive efforts and done enough, in what we'd expect them to do in trying to locate the account.

I do want to say that I acknowledge C's strength of feeling in this complaint, especially in view of the amount in question, and how very frustrating it must be to not receive the information about the account that C desires. I don't think Barclays have done anything wrong here and I'm not upholding C's complaint.

My final decision

For the reasons I have given it is my final decision that the complaint is not upheld.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask the estate of Mrs O to accept or reject my decision before 11 September 2025.

Chris Blamires
Ombudsman

