

The complaint

Mrs N complains that Bank of Ireland (UK) Plc has been unable to trace an account in her name. I'll refer to the bank in this case as the Post Office, the brand under which it operates here.

What happened

Mrs N held a 12-month growth bond with the Post Office. It matured in October 2010, at which point funds, amounting to more than £10,000, were to be transferred into an Easy Saver account.

In early 2023 Mrs N contacted the bank about the Easy Saver account, asking for information about the funds in it. The Post Office said that it was unable to trace the account. This was, it said, consistent with it having been closed several years previously, and it believed that is what had happened. It said too that the account number had since been allocated to a different customer.

Mrs N insisted that she had not closed the account and had not transferred funds from it. She believed it must still be open, even if it had been made dormant. She referred the matter to this service.

One of our investigators considered what had happened. She thought that the most likely explanation for the bank's inability to trace the account and the funds in it was that it had been closed many years ago. She did not recommend that the complaint be upheld. Mrs N did not accept the investigator's assessment and asked that an ombudsman review the case.

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 am satisfied that Mrs N had a fixed-term account with the Post Office and that it matured in October 2010. I am satisfied too that, on maturity, the funds held to the credit of that account were transferred to an Easy Saver account in Mrs N's name. There is also evidence that the savings account was still in existence in or around June 2011, as Mrs N has account identification from that time.

I have however seen nothing to show that the account remained open after that date; equally, there is nothing to show that it was closed either – such as closure instructions or evidence of a transfer to another account.

The Post Office has however explained – and I accept – that once accounts have been closed for seven years, it removes records of them. That is consistent with standard industry practice and is in line with the requirements of data protection legislation.

The Post Office has provided this service with information about its efforts to locate the account. They show that it has searched under Mrs N's married and maiden names, against her date of birth and against her customer number. It has also checked her addresses. It has not been able to locate the account.

I understand that this is frustrating for Mrs N, but the fact that no records have been found is, in my view, consistent with the account having been closed at least seven years before the search – that is, some time before the beginning of 2016. I believe that the bank's search has been thorough but has not revealed an account which is still open. The fact that the bank cannot find any evidence of what happened to the money in the account is, counter-intuitively, an indication that it was closed several years ago.

I realise that, even if the account has been closed, she would still like to know what happened to the money. It was a significant sum, and I think it unlikely that she simply forgot about it. She may be able to check other accounts she has held or consider any significant life changes which might have required funding between around 2011 and 2016. I am afraid though that is not something this service or the Post Office can realistically assist with.

My final decision

For these reasons, my final decision is that I do not uphold Mrs N's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs N to accept or reject my decision before 6 October 2025.

Mike Ingram

Ombudsman