

The complaint

Mr R complains Experian Limited gave him incorrect advice to help him prevent identity fraud being carried out using his details following him being notified about searches on his credit file.

What happened

Mr R is a Experian Identity Plus customer. Experian's website lists five key benefits – two of which are named as Enhanced Fraud Support and Experian Fraud alerts.

For the Enhanced Fraud Support the headline explanation says if someone is a victim of fraud, then Experian's experts will help walk them through the next steps. And the Fraud alerts relate to notifications when accounts are opened, closed or a search is conducted on someone's credit file.

In February 2024 Mr R received notifications to say his credit report had been searched. He said none of the searches were by him, checked online but couldn't see any of the searches, so he then called Experian. In this call he was told to take a number of corrective actions to prevent any potential fraud issues – and in the meantime they'd look into the searches. But before Mr R was able to complete all of the fraud prevention measures, he then received an email which said he didn't need to do anything further as there was nothing to be worried about.

Mr R called and was told there were training issues given the first call and email had differing advice – but it was reiterated on this call Mr R didn't need to do anything as there were no concerns. Mr R says Experian's adviser suggested he raise a complaint – so he did. And Mr R says while he was waiting for the complaint to be investigated unfortunately fraud was taking place using his details.

Experian replied – and accepted they hadn't met their usual standards around the level of service they'd provided to him. They explained they identified the searches, and thought they were possibly due to a price comparison website – and sometimes these websites will do a search without reference to their customer – which could be why Mr R didn't know anything about them. But, in any event, they'd contacted the relevant companies to have the searches removed. Experian apologised but said they have strict guidelines on when they can offer compensation, and in Mr R's instance they couldn't offer any.

Unhappy with this Mr R asked us to look into things, saying their complaints process acknowledged significant failings, but didn't offer any compensation.

As part of our standard process, we asked Experian for their file. They provided a summary, as part of this said on reflection they'd taken too long to tell Mr R why the searches hadn't appeared to him online when he checked – and offered £25 in recognition of this.

Mr R didn't accept this – asking us to fully investigate.

Our Investigator did so, and ultimately felt Experian gave Mr R the incorrect advice. He upheld the complaint and awarded £200 compensation.

Mr R replied, thanked our Investigator for the report, and said he'd wait for the final outcome. Experian replied disagreeing – saying they weren't responsible for the fraud because the lender didn't tell them an account was being taken out in Mr R's name.

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 think it's important to explain I've considered all of the information provided by both parties in reaching my decision. If I've not reflected or answered something that's been said it's not because I didn't see it, it's because I didn't deem it relevant to the crux of the complaint. This isn't intended as a discourtesy to either party, but merely to reflect my informal role in deciding what a fair and reasonable outcome is.

So I think it's clear there are two points to consider – and as Experian have accepted they have made an error I'll need to decide what compensation I think is fair.

Delay in telling Mr R why he couldn't see the searches he'd received the alert for

Experian have accepted they took too long to tell Mr R why he couldn't see the searches which their system alerted him to.

I think it's clear this has added to the overall frustration Mr R has experienced – so I'll take this into account when deciding a fair amount of compensation.

Whether Experian gave Mr R the correct advice about protecting himself from fraud

Experian have said fraud occurred with the other credit reference agencies (CRAs) – so if Mr R has concerns about how they've acted it's probably best he contacts them directly.

Mr R says if he was given the right advice consistently by Experian when he contacted them, then the fraud wouldn't have happened in the first place.

Given the context of Mr R's concerns, I think perhaps Experian have misunderstood what he's saying. In essence Mr R is saying had Experian been consistent in the advice they'd initially given him – including to register his accounts with Cifas – then the fraud, or at least some of it, may have been prevented.

Experian have categorised their Identity Plus service as designed to prevent fraud they themselves could identify through the proactive monitoring of Mr R's Experian credit file. But I think it's fair to say their general advice could have an impact on the ability of fraudsters to take out accounts even where the lender doesn't use Experian's data. For example – if Mr R had registered with Cifas like Experian originally advised I think it's possible the accounts that were then fraudulently opened may not have been.

Initially, Experian do seem to have identified the searches as suspicious – which I think was likely the correct position to take at the time. I say that because these were multiple searches by credit card companies – who Mr R didn't hold accounts with. And when Experian suggested this could be due to him using a price comparison website, Mr R told Experian he didn't use those websites. So, at this point and before any fraud has occurred – Mr R's credit file has had multiple searches carried out – most on the same day – by companies he doesn't have an existing relationship with and there isn't a plausible legitimate explanation for this. In the circumstances, I can understand why Mr R is frustrated he was then told by Experian there wasn't anything to worry about only to later find out he was the victim of fraud.

In the circumstances, I'm satisfied Experian could have done more here. Clearly, I can't hold them entirely responsible for the fraud – as that's the fraudster and, possibly, the lender who granted the lending. But, I think Mr R had a reasonable expectation of being given good and clear advice when he contacted Experian and I'm not satisfied he received that. If the message from Experian had stayed consistent then it's possible Mr R wouldn't have experienced accounts being opened in his name. At the very least, Mr R wouldn't have been left feeling like there was more than could have happened before the fraud occurred.

Summary

Given Experian's delay in telling Mr R about the reason he couldn't see the searches, plus the incorrect advice about the fraud measures, I'm satisfied compensation is fair. Overall, I think a total of £200 is a fair reflection of the proportionate responsibility I place on Experian for the impact of these events on Mr R.

My final decision

I uphold this complaint and require Experian Limited to pay Mr R £200 compensation.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr R to accept or reject my decision before 22 October 2025.

Jon Pearce
Ombudsman