

The complaint

Miss M complains to Scottish Friendly Assurance Society Limited about the difficulty she's having in monitoring her investment performance.

What happened

Miss M has invested money into individual savings accounts (ISAs) with Scottish Friendly. She monitors the performance of her investments regularly and in August 2024 she noticed a change in the values – instead of displaying her current valuations, the 'My Plans' home screen on the app was instead displaying the total of the ISA's guaranteed minimum cash-in values – something which is relevant on the 10th anniversary of each investment.

These values weren't of interest to Miss M as while they could be important in the future, she was more interested in her current valuations that fluctuated daily. She was able to access current valuations, but to do so meant clicking into each of her ISA investment pots and finding the current values to add up.

Miss M found the change in reporting not only confusing, but unhelpful too, so she shared her concerns with Scottish Friendly. After some back and forth, Scottish Friendly treated her concerns as a complaint and sent her a final response letter. They said, in summary, they weren't aware of changes made to how they reported on valuations. but nevertheless highlighted that both the guaranteed values and current values were able to be viewed on the app or website.

During the back and forth, one of Scottish Friendly's members of staff had included some valuation figures within an email. This gave Miss M concerns about security, but Scottish Friendly explained they'd only included them for illustrative reasons. They didn't think they'd made an error in citing them but agreed to add a warning onto Miss M's file to make sure it didn't happen again.

Miss M hoped the app would be updated to be clearer about what value was being shown and Scottish Friendly said they'd share her feedback internally. Miss M asked to be updated on the progress of that work, but as she didn't hear any more from Scottish Friendly, she decided to ask for our help.

One of our investigators looked into Miss M's concerns, but she didn't agree Scottish Friendly had done anything wrong. She thought that while Miss M might have noticed a change in how valuations were being displayed, she was aware of what each of the different figures represented and was able to view current valuations – ultimately she felt the impact on Miss M was limited, and explained we weren't able to interfere with Scottish Friendly's commercial judgement. She also didn't think the ISA valuations within an email had been a concerning security breach.

Miss M remained unhappy. She felt the presentation of figures was unnecessarily confusing and explained the impact led to her using an inflated figure on her universal credit submissions, which had in turn affected her income. She shared various screenshots from

her Scottish Friendly app to highlight that the figures used were not defined and that things could be presented much more clearly.

Miss M also shared her concerns about how Scottish Friendly had handled her complaint – she'd heard from five people before getting a response and thought this only added to her confusion and caused unnecessary timewasting. And when she had the response, she felt it missed the point and therefore only added to the timewasting. She also flagged that she hadn't had any update as to whether changes to the app would be made.

To resolve things, Miss M wanted Scottish Friendly to apologise to her, to make changes to customer services so that multiple staff weren't involved in sorting problems out, to notify customers when changes to the app were happening and of course to clarify the default view for her plan values.

Our investigator went back to Scottish Friendly but their stance remained that they'd not made changes to how valuations were shown in their app, nevertheless they'd shared the feedback. They said the way they displayed information on their app was their commercial decision, and that this had limited impact on Miss M given she'd demonstrated her understanding of what each figure represented.

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.

It remains in dispute as to whether Scottish Friendly's app was changed last summer or not. Scottish Friendly say nothing did change. Miss M says it did. On the face of the files submitted to us as part of this investigation, it's not been something I can verify as Scottish Friendly won't have evidence of something they say doesn't exist, and Miss M is unlikely to have any 'before' screenshots as she wasn't to anticipate any change. This said, whether there was a reporting change or not isn't something that will alter my findings as I have instead focussed on the sufficiency of what Miss M can see.

Miss M says what's now displayed on her 'My Plans' home page are the guaranteed values relevant on each ISA's 10th anniversary. I appreciate that throughout the first ten years of the investment life, those sums aren't of much interest to her if she regularly likes to review how stock market performance is causing fluctuation to the value of her investments.

That said, I can see that Miss M is able to move on from the overview page and check the current valuation of each ISA separately. As much as this might be slightly less convenient for her – given she needs to click into another screen and add up each valuation to get her total current value – it's not only something that's possible, it's also something that's done without too much trouble and is something Miss M has demonstrated she understands. Scottish Friendly have shown how they share values and how they are defined. So from what I've seen, Miss M is able to access the information she needs despite preferring it to be presented differently.

The option of presenting something differently doesn't mean Scottish Friendly have done something wrong here. Our service wouldn't look to intervene in a business' commercial judgement about how they design their platforms. So long as they're reporting what they need to from a regulatory point of view, how they format it or display it will often be their choice and in line with their branding.

There is often scope for improvement – and it's encouraging to see Scottish Friendly did agree with our investigator that labelling of values could be better and that they were looking

into updating their platforms. That said, they crucially pointed out that relevant information here for Miss M isn't missing or misleading and I agree. Ultimately they are providing Miss M with the information she needs, she just may be somewhat inconvenienced by having to view it differently to how she'd like.

Lastly, I appreciate it was frustrating for Miss M to hear from various different people at Scottish Friendly while raising these issues and I appreciate her concern around having her financial information shared within an email.

Regarding the email, it seems that the member of staff was trying to be helpful in getting to the bottom of understanding Miss M's concerns and was showing what he could see as the current values. Though this worried Miss M, I can see why he chose to include the information and don't think the limited nature of what was shared has put Miss M at risk.

Regarding the complaints journey more generally, I understand that speaking to different staff members can require some amount of repetition. But like our investigator said, often large companies have teams of people dedicated to helping customers and it is usually the case that queries can be more quickly supported across a team, as opposed to creating a queue for certain individuals. Rather like the formatting issues, how Scottish Friendly choose to organise themselves internally or handle their incoming queries is their choice – importantly, I don't think they've caused additional undue inconvenience over and above the usual level we might encounter in dealing with our daily affairs.

I know this will be disappointing to Miss M, but I don't think there are reasonable grounds upon which I could fairly ask Scottish Friendly to do anything differently.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold the complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss M to accept or reject my decision before 23 October 2025.

Aimee Stanton
Ombudsman