

The complaint

Mrs G complains that Vanguard Asset Management, Ltd, didn't act promptly enough in restoring her account access following an IT issue.

Mrs G is represented in the complaint by her husband but for simplicity, I'll refer to all submissions as having come from her.

What happened

On 5 March 2025, Mrs G realised that she couldn't access her Vanguard account online and informed the business the same day. Vanguard said they would resolve the issue, but this wasn't completed until 29 March 2025. Following the reinstatement of Mrs G's access, on 4 April 2025 she realised her husband had lost the ability to view her account from his sign on, and Mrs G had to manually reset this service for it to be reinstated.

Unhappy, Mrs G complained to Vanguard who upheld her complaint. In their final response they apologised for the inconvenience caused and the time taken to respond to the complaint and offered £100 in compensation to resolve the issue.

Mrs G remained unhappy, so referred her complaint to this service. In summary, she said that she didn't feel that the resolution offered reflected the seriousness of being locked out of her account for over three weeks. She received no explanation for what happened and is concerned that Vanguard repeatedly failed to stand by assurances they made, and they also have not complied with their own complaint procedure.

To put things right, Mrs G said that she wanted Vanguard to increase their compensation offer to reflect the seriousness and distress experienced and apologise for their shortcomings in complaint handling.

The complaint was then considered by one of our Investigators. He concluded that Vanguard has acknowledged their error and accepted that Mrs G was unable to access her account. He went on to say that he wasn't persuaded that the compensation offered by Vanguard was not fair and reasonable, as it is in line with our approach. In addition, he stated that as he'd not received sufficient evidence to persuade him that a financial loss was caused, he didn't believe any further redress was necessary.

Mrs G was unhappy with that outcome, so the complaint now comes to me for a decision.

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 summarised this complaint in less detail than Mrs G has done and I've done so using my own words. The purpose of my decision isn't to address every single point raised by all of the parties involved. If there's something I've not mentioned, it isn't because I've ignored it - I haven't. I'm satisfied that I don't need to comment on every individual argument to be able to reach what I think is the right outcome. No discourtesy is intended by this; our rules allow me to do this and it simply reflects the informal nature of our service as a free alternative to the courts.

My role is to consider the evidence presented by Mrs G and Vanguard in order to reach what I think is an independent, fair and reasonable decision based on the facts of the case. In deciding what's fair and reasonable, I must consider the relevant law, regulation and best industry practice. Where there's conflicting information about what happened and gaps in what we know, my role is to weigh up the evidence we do have, but it is for me to decide, based on the available information that I've been given, what's more likely than not to have happened. And, having done so, whilst I'm upholding Mrs G's complaint, I'm not going to instruct Vanguard to do anything beyond what they've already offered - I'll explain why below.

I can well imagine how frustrated Mrs G must've been when she was unable to access her account. From what I've seen, she had to chase Vanguard on a number of occasions; 7 and 24 March 2025 before they finally resolved matters for her on 29 March 2025. And it seems that following the access restoration, Vanguard haven't been able to explain to Mrs G the background to why the event occurred. During that window, Mrs G says she found it incredibly stressful in waiting for Vanguard to resolve matters for her, particularly when she was also unable to access a family member's account too.

Using financial services won't always be hassle free and sometimes mistakes occur. I appreciate that Vanguard haven't set out the background to why the issue occurred in the first place and whilst I think it would be useful context for Mrs G to know, I'm not persuaded that it would make any difference to the end outcome here. She now has access to her account and her husband can also see her holdings too, as she's requested. Vanguard have apologised and offered £100.

Having considered the duration of the access issue, the number of times Mrs G needed to chase Vanguard and the understandable stress this caused, I'm satisfied she experienced avoidable inconvenience. But based on the evidence I've seen, the impact falls within the level for which an award of around £100 is typically appropriate.

I've not seen any conclusive evidence that Mrs G needed access to her monies in the intervening period and/or needed to make alterations to her investments within that three-week window, so I don't believe a financial compensation payment is necessary here. In any event, from what I've seen from Vanguard's website, they have a customer service helpline that Mrs G could have telephoned had she needed to undertake administrative changes or access to statements in the intervening period.

While I appreciate Mrs G's concerns about the time Vanguard took to respond to her concerns, the way a firm handles a complaint isn't a regulated activity. I can't require compensation specifically for complaint-handling delays, though I have taken the overall experience into account when assessing the distress and inconvenience caused.

My final decision

Vanguard Asset Management, Ltd, have already offered to pay Mrs G £100 to settle the complaint which I'm of the opinion is fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

So, my decision is that Vanguard Asset Management, Ltd, should pay Mrs G £100 if they've not already done so.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs G to accept or reject my decision before 15 March 2026.

Simon Fox
Ombudsman