

The complaint

Mrs H complains that Shawbrook Bank Limited has unfairly refused to write off her outstanding debt on medical grounds.

What happened

Mrs H has an outstanding debt with Shawbrook. Due to ill health, Mrs H says she is unable to work and has supplied evidence of this to her creditors. Mrs H is unhappy that Shawbrook hasn't agreed to write her debt off. She points out that another creditor has written her debt off based on the same medical evidence.

Shawbrook said that the medical evidence supplied by Mrs H showed that her long-term employment prospects shouldn't be impacted.

Our investigator didn't recommend that Mrs H's complaint be upheld. In his first view, our investigator didn't think the evidence Mrs H supplied to Shawbrook conclusively stated that she would be unable to work in the future. Our investigator also said that Shawbrook isn't obliged to write off a debt, even if other lenders have decided to.

Mrs H responded to the first view saying that the specialist issued their medical report before she received a further diagnosis, so the report doesn't reflect her long-term prognosis. Mrs H says that she explained this to Shawbrook and provided a letter from her GP outlining several serious long term medical conditions which impact her ability to carry out any physical activities. Mrs H said that Shawbrook had acknowledged a degree of unfairness in its' treatment of her by paying £25 compensation.

Our investigator issued a second view to respond to the points which Mrs H raised. In summary he said that both the medical report and GP's letter only mention employment involving physical work. They also didn't specify how far into the future Mrs H might be impacted.

Our investigator said that although Shawbrook paid £25 compensation to apologise for an unclear email, this didn't mean it had treated Mrs H unfairly overall.

Our investigator explained that the Financial Ombudsman Service couldn't tell Shawbrook to write Mrs H's debt off. He thought Shawbrook had fairly told Mrs H that it would consider any further evidence she supplied in the future.

Mrs H said that she is in receipt of the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) based on an assessment of her health and functional capacity, which demonstrates that her medical conditions severely and permanently restrict her ability to work.

Our investigator said he had already considered the PIP as part of his assessment. As Mrs H doesn't accept the investigation outcome, her complaint has come to me to make a final 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 am sorry to hear about the difficulties which Mrs H has faced and don't wish to undermine the gravity of her situation. But my role is to consider whether - based on the evidence Mrs H gave to Shawbrook – it made a mistake or treated her unfairly when declining her medical write off request. I am sorry to disappoint Mrs H, but I agree with our investigator that Shawbrook hasn't treated her unfairly and will explain why. I also agree that Shawbrook's compensation payment of £25 was a fair way to recognise that its email to Mrs H of June 2025 could have been clearer than it was.

The medical report which Mrs H gave to Shawbrook highlights a series of medical issues sustained following an accident. The report acknowledges the fact that Mrs H had always had physical jobs which she could no longer perform. However, the report concludes by saying that Mrs H's prospects on the open labour market should not be affected in the long term because of the physical injuries she sustained. So, I don't think it was unreasonable for Shawbrook to decline Mrs H's write off request on the basis that she may be able to carry out a different form of work in the future.

The same logic applies to the letter written by Mrs H's GP in May 2025. Although it says that Mrs H's ability to perform physical work in employment is impacted by her health conditions, it doesn't say how long this may last nor that her health conditions would prevent her from carrying out any work at all. I also agree with our investigator that although Mrs H receives PIP – which is designed to support people with long term health conditions who have difficulty carrying out tasks or getting around - this benefit can be given to people who also work. So, it doesn't change my decision that Shawbrook didn't act unfairly when it considered Mrs H's write off request.

I understand that it is frustrating for Mrs H that Shawbrook has declined her request given that other creditors have agreed to take this step. But I need to consider Mrs H's individual complaint as it relates to Shawbrook. Just because another business has taken a different approach, doesn't mean that Shawbrook must do the same. I should also say that based on the evidence Mrs H has supplied, her haven't written debts off. Instead, they have told Mrs H that they won't take any action to recover the outstanding debts and won't ask her for payment. This is different from a medical write off, although I appreciate that the result of either option would be that Mrs H doesn't have to make further payments towards the debts.

Shawbrook has made it clear it will consider any further evidence which Mrs H would like to submit to support her request to write the debt off - this seems fair. I also remind Shawbrook of its obligation to treat Mrs H fairly and reasonably if it tries to collect the outstanding debt in the future. If Mrs H is unhappy with the way Shawbrook responds to any evidence she puts forward about her ability to repay the debt, I don't see why she could not complain again.

My final decision

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

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs H to accept or reject my decision before 12 January 2026.

Gemma Bowen
Ombudsman