

The complaint

X complains that Barclays Bank UK PLC trading as Tesco Bank ('Tesco Bank') doesn't have the 'Mx' title option available for customers to use and this has caused them distress. X is also unhappy with a password Tesco Bank used for some correspondence with them.

What happened

In December 2024, X raised a complaint with Tesco Bank, their credit card provider. This previous complaint is not the subject of this decision and is included here for background purposes only.

In order to access Tesco Bank's response to that previous complaint, X had to enter a password, but they found the password to be disrespectful and upsetting. X was concerned Tesco Bank had been disrespectful to them due to their race or disability.

X contacted Tesco Bank on 2 January 2025 to raise a further complaint about this. And, on 3 January 2025, X contacted Tesco Bank to raise an additional complaint point – that they are unable to input their correct title as Tesco Bank's system currently does not offer the title 'Mx'.

Tesco Bank provided their final response to that complaint on 10 January 2025. In summary, Tesco Bank said that while the password was randomly generated, they accepted this had caused upset to X. Tesco Bank also said that not all aspects of that previous complaint had been addressed.

In relation to the 'Mx' title option, Tesco Bank accepted this isn't something they currently offer. But, said that they were working to get their systems updated to include it. They explained that their systems do not allow the 'Title' field to be left blank but in the meantime offered to amend X's title to another gender-neutral title such as 'Dr'.

Tesco Bank also paid £70 compensation to say sorry for the overall customer journey they had experienced.

X was unhappy with this response and referred the complaint to our Service. The Investigator upheld the complaint as they didn't think it was fair for Tesco Bank not to offer Mx as a title option for X.

Our Investigator recommended that Tesco Bank pay X £200 for the distress and inconvenience caused and also recommended that it take significant steps towards adding Mx as a title option within twelve months. The Investigator was satisfied that the password had been randomly generated, and there hadn't been any intention on Tesco Bank's part to cause X distress, so they did not recommend any further action for Tesco Bank on that point.

Tesco Bank did not agree with the outcome and asked for an Ombudsman to make a final decision – which is why the case has been passed to me.

I considered the matter and issued a provisional decision dated 10 September 2025. In that decision I said:

"I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint."

I've also taken into account relevant law and regulations, the regulator's (the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)) rules, guidance and standards and codes of practice, and what I consider to have been good industry practice at the time.

Having taken all of the above into account, I'm currently intending to uphold this complaint for largely the same reasons as the Investigator. For the avoidance of doubt, the two issues remaining in dispute are the password sent to X in relation to the previous complaint, and that X is unable to input their correct title of Mx, since Tesco Bank's systems currently do not offer this option. I'll set out my findings on each of these points below.

Password for the final response letter

As previously mentioned, X was sent a response to their previous complaint in December 2024 and from what I can see, this was sent by a secure email.

This meant that in order for X to access the response, they had to enter a password which was sent via text message.

Tesco Bank have explained that these passwords are generated for consumers by a piece of software. And, that the passwords the software generates are random. Tesco Bank have said that while the software is not designed to generate passwords containing offensive words, due to the random nature of it, there are occasionally times when it may generate a password containing words or parts of words that when combined, are inappropriate or upsetting.

Further, Tesco Bank have explained that the password generation is automatic and can't be edited. But, they said that staff are encouraged to check the relevant password which has been generated to make sure it is appropriate and if not, to generate a new one.

In this particular case, the password which was generated contained a word which in the context of a complaint, could sound inappropriate and I can appreciate why X found it to be upsetting.

But based on the information provided about how the passwords are generated i.e. randomly, I think it's likely the member of staff simply did not realise the one generated here could be interpreted negatively or alternatively, forgot to check it before it was sent. In any case, I have not currently seen anything to suggest there was any malicious or discriminatory intent towards X on the part of Tesco Bank here; but rather, human error.

Tesco Bank have provided X with an apology here and explained that they've fed back to the relevant staff member to try to ensure this does not happen again. And, having taken everything into account, I think this is a fair and reasonable way to resolve this point.

Availability of the Mx title

As outlined above, X has complained that they are unable to input their correct title of Mx, as Tesco Bank's systems currently do not offer this option.

X has told our Service that as a result of the Mx title option not being available and the responses they received from Tesco Bank in relation to this issue, they felt their identity was being downplayed and diminished. And, that they felt dismissed, belittled and that Tesco Bank was being condescending and insensitive towards them.

As noted above, we do take the law into account when reaching our decisions, including what we think a court would likely decide. But, it's also important to emphasise that we don't base our decisions purely on whether a business is legally required to do something.

Our Service makes decisions on the basis of what we consider to be fair and reasonable in the individual circumstances of the complaint.

As noted above, I'm also required to take into account what I consider to have been good industry practice at the relevant time. And here, I consider that it's good practice to offer customers (including transgender and non-binary customers) a range of titles to use, including at least one gender-neutral title option which isn't associated with a specific profession. I'm aware for example, many other firms which offer similar products and services to Tesco Bank already do this, including offering the title Mx for their customers to use.

Based on all of the above, I don't agree that it would be fair or reasonable for X to be treated differently than any other customer on the basis of their gender identity. So, that is my starting point; to question whether X was being treated differently by Tesco Bank than a cisgender customer would have been.

From what I've seen, the standard range of titles that I'd expect to see offered to cisgender customers (such as Mr, Miss, Mrs and so on), are available options offered by Tesco Bank. So, it would seem that cisgender customers are likely to be able to use their correct title in relation to their account.

Mx is the standard title most commonly used by non-binary people in the UK, but this option is not available to Tesco Bank customers. As such, X has not been able to use their correct title and Tesco Bank don't dispute this.

Therefore, X has been treated differently than a cisgender customer would have been in the same circumstances, purely as a result of their non-binary gender identity. In my view, this is not fair or reasonable. Furthermore, I think it was (or should've been) foreseeable to Tesco Bank that this would be potentially offensive and distressing to X. So, I don't think Tesco Bank have acted fairly or reasonably here.

I've considered what Tesco Bank have had to say in response to the Investigator's view about not being obliged under the law or regulatory rules to provide a non-binary or gender-neutral title for customers to use. For the avoidance of doubt - I agree. Ultimately, there isn't a requirement for Tesco Bank to provide any title for any of their customers to use – but Tesco Bank choose to offer their cisgender customers the option of being able to use their correct titles. The important point here therefore is that Tesco Bank is not prevented from being able to offer the Mx title to their customers and again, I'd consider this to be in line with good industry practice. So, I would hope and expect to see Tesco Bank recognising the potential impact on customers of not allowing them to identify in accordance with their authentic gender identity and proactively taking steps to address and resolve this issue.

I also don't think Tesco Bank's previous suggestion to X that they select another title such as 'Dr' is helpful or appropriate. As the Investigator highlighted, X is not a doctor and this still means they are not able to use their correct title. There is no reason why X should be compelled to use an incorrect title simply due to their gender identity, when all cisgender customers have an appropriate range of title options available to them. Further, I note that Tesco Bank provide a significant variety of other titles, some of which are gendered and some of which are work-related. For example, they provide approximately nineteen military titles such as Admiral ('ADM') and Ensign ('ENS'), including different variations of the same title (e.g. 'LT COL' and 'LTC'). And, Tesco Bank haven't explained why adding the Mx title to that list for their customers to use wouldn't be feasible.

Having considered all of the information provided so far, I'm persuaded that X experienced both upset and inconvenience as a result of this matter and continues to do so. So, I think an award of compensation is appropriate here. Having carefully

considered everything, along with our Service's guidelines and general approach to compensation, I think £200 compensation is fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

As has already been explained to both parties, I would not be able to mandate that Tesco Bank make the relevant change to their systems or instruct them to do so by a specific date. However, if Tesco Bank is minded to update their systems by adding the Mx title option, it is reasonable to acknowledge that making such a change is likely to take some time. That means I'd be unlikely to uphold any further complaint from X about this same issue within the next twelve months.

If the position remains the same after such time has passed, Tesco Bank should be aware that X may choose to raise a further complaint if they feel they have experienced additional distress in relation to this matter."

In conclusion, I explained that I intended to uphold the complaint and intended to direct Tesco Bank to pay X £200 compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Tesco Bank initially asked for some more time to respond to the provisional decision, which was provided to them. But, they also did not respond by this further deadline and so did not provide any further comments or evidence they wanted to be considered.

X did respond to the provisional decision and provided some further comments they wanted me to consider, in relation to the password for the final response letter.

As the relevant deadline(s) have passed, I'm now finalising my 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.

As I did in my provisional decision, I've also taken into account relevant law and regulations, the regulator's (the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA)) rules, guidance and standards and codes of practice, and what I consider to have been good industry practice at the time.

Password for the final response letter

Having considered X's further comments in relation to this element of the complaint, they've said they consider this to be a hate crime and therefore they don't feel that I've acknowledged the serious nature of Tesco Bank's mistake here and dealt with the matter accordingly.

I think it's important to reflect on our Service's role. We don't perform the same role as, for example, the police or the courts. As I've outlined above, we do take relevant law into account when reaching our decisions, but we can't make a decision as to whether a business has broken the law – only a court can do so. It's also not part of our Service's role to review a business's systems as a whole or mandate wider change in relation to them – that is the role of the regulator.

Our Service's role is to fairly resolve complaints, with minimum formality. And, we are also an impartial Service, meaning we need to be fair to both parties to the complaint.

To be clear, I do take this complaint and X's concerns about Tesco Bank's actions here seriously, but I do so with the above points regarding our Service's role in mind.

X has said they consider Tesco Bank's explanation as to why the password issue occurred to be irrelevant. But, I don't agree. I think it is relevant to consider why a mistake occurred, as well as what impact it had on an individual consumer. And, in the absence of any new evidence in relation to this point, I remain satisfied that there was no malicious or

discriminatory intent on the part of Tesco Bank here in the password they provided for the letter.

And again, I've taken into account that Tesco have provided an apology for this and fed back to the staff member in question to ensure this does not happen again. Therefore, while I fully acknowledge the upset X has experienced and their strength of feeling on this matter, I still think this is a reasonable way to resolve this point.

Availability of the Mx title

Neither party has provided any further comments in relation to this element of the complaint – the availability of the Mx title. So, it follows that my conclusions in relation to that point are the same as I outlined in my provisional decision – that Tesco Bank should pay X £200 compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused.

My final decision

I uphold this complaint and direct Barclays Bank UK PLC trading as Tesco Bank to pay X £200 compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask X to accept or reject my decision before 8 December 2025.

Fiona Mallinson
Ombudsman