

The complaint

Miss Y has complained about how National Westminster Bank Public Limited Company handled her request to raise a chargeback.

What happened

Using her NatWest debit card, Miss Y booked a flight and accommodation for a trip abroad through a third party booking website that I'll refer to as 'X'. Unfortunately, Miss Y's visa was delayed and she was unable to travel. X gave Miss Y a partial refund for the cost of her trip but didn't offer a full refund of her flight ticket. So, Miss Y then contacted NatWest in May 2025 to make a claim for the cost of her return flight ticket booked via X.

NatWest asked Miss Y about refunds she'd already received from X. Miss Y complained and said some of the refunds were actually from a different retailer. NatWest issued a response to Miss Y's complaint. It said the airline's cancellation policy meant a chargeback was unlikely to succeed. However, NatWest said it gave Miss Y conflicting information about how to raise a chargeback for a separate merchant, and she'd been transferred to several departments unnecessarily. It credited her account with £60 compensation.

Miss Y sent in documents from X that confirmed the refund related solely to her booked accommodation and not her flights. NatWest reopened its investigation but, in the meantime, X agreed to give Miss Y a full refund of her flight ticket. Miss Y asked NatWest to keep its chargeback investigation open until she received the refund, but NatWest said it wouldn't look into the matter further.

Miss Y referred her complaint to our service on 16 June 2025 and continued to email NatWest about her claim. NatWest then issued a further final response on 18 June 2025. This said it had provided clear responses about the chargeback and it hadn't made an error. Even though NatWest said it had handled the chargeback correctly, it should have reopened her complaint after she continued to contact them. NatWest credited Miss Y's account with a further £100 compensation.

Unhappy with NatWest's response, Miss Y referred her complaint to our service. She said NatWest's handling of her claim was unprofessional and discriminatory, and that NatWest had assumed accommodation refunds were related to a flight ticket. Miss Y wanted her chargeback request to be reviewed, compensation, an apology and a recommendation that NatWest improve its complaints handling procedures.

One of our investigators reviewed this complaint and didn't think NatWest needed to take further action. The investigator said NatWest wasn't obliged to raise a chargeback because it was unlikely to have succeeded. This was because the airline's cancellation policy didn't entitle her to a full refund of her flight ticket. Having reviewed Miss Y's complaint that she believed she may have been discriminated against, the investigator said he didn't think NatWest had acted unfairly or unreasonably.

Miss Y didn't accept our investigator's opinion and said they hadn't analysed the evidence properly and ignored key elements of her complaint. Miss Y reiterated her complaint points and asked for an ombudsman to review her complaint. So, this complaint has come 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've considered the information submitted by all the relevant parties but won't be commenting on it all. I confirm I've considered all relevant law and regulations, including the Equality Act 2010 and the Financial Conduct Authority's Consumer Duty. However, I'll comment only on the issues I consider to be crucial to the outcome of this complaint. This isn't intended as a discourtesy to either party but reflects the informal nature of our service.

Miss Y complained that NatWest failed to consider her chargeback request fairly and feels it breached its Consumer Duty to her. Chargeback doesn't cover all eventualities, isn't a legal right and isn't guaranteed to get a customer a refund. Strict rules and timeframes apply to chargebacks, and these are set out by the card scheme operator. It is good practice for NatWest to attempt a chargeback where it has a reasonable prospect of success.

After Miss Y asked NatWest to raise a chargeback, it identified refunds from X. Having compared NatWest's letters to Miss Y's account statements, I think NatWest identified the refunds from X correctly and I don't think it made an error here. NatWest explained to Miss Y it has one opportunity to raise a chargeback so it needs to be clear whether the refunds related to the chargeback. So, I think NatWest was right to ask Miss Y about these refunds.

In its final response of 4 June 2025, NatWest said the terms and conditions of Miss Y's flight didn't entitle her to a full refund. I've considered the evidence provided by Miss Y and I don't think this decision was unreasonable. Whilst the circumstances that prevented her travelling were outside of Miss Y's control, I've seen nothing in the evidence she provided to NatWest that shows she was entitled to a full refund of her flight ticket, or that she'd been promised a full refund that hadn't been received. I've checked the card scheme's rules and I've not found any grounds on which a chargeback for the full cost of the flight ticket was likely to have succeeded. So, I don't think NatWest was obliged to raise a chargeback. As I think NatWest's decision not to raise a chargeback was reasonable, and I've not seen that NatWest breached its Consumer Duty towards Miss Y when considering her request to raise a chargeback.

Miss Y feels NatWest may have discriminated against her because of her race. I don't have the power to make a finding that the Equality Act 2010 has been breached, which is something only the Courts can do. However, given Miss Y's concerns and as it's relevant law, I have taken the Equality Act 2010 into account. For the reasons explained above, I think NatWest's decision not to raise a chargeback was fair and reasonable and I don't think Miss Y was unfairly singled out in any way.

I acknowledge Miss Y feels there were several failures in how NatWest handled her claim. She has complained about NatWest's Secure Messenger system closed prematurely, preventing her from submitting her evidence and that she was misdirected on a web chat. NatWest acknowledged Miss Y was unhappy with its web chat service but explained response times were not guaranteed.

In its June 2025 response to her complaint, NatWest went on to say it accepted Miss Y had been passed around different departments and paid her £60 compensation. Given NatWest had reached a reasonable decision on Miss Y's claim, and any error was rectified promptly, I think this offer was fair based on what had happened at the time.

Whilst our investigator thought NatWest didn't need to take any further action, I have also taken into consideration the £100 NatWest paid following its final response of 18 June 2025. NatWest admitted it should have reopened Miss Y's complaint. However, I think NatWest had handled Miss Y's claim fairly and reasonably, and the outcome of her claim remained unchanged. NatWest was also in regular communication with Miss Y. So, I think any inconvenience caused as a result of not reopening her complaint sooner was limited. In the circumstances, I think NatWest's total payments of £160 compensation fairly reflect the distress and inconvenience caused by the errors NatWest has admitted.

Having reviewed NatWest's claims handling, I think NatWest reached a fair and reasonable decision not to raise a chargeback on Miss Y's behalf. NatWest has admitted two errors that I've outlined above, and I've not seen other errors in its dealings with Miss Y. So whilst I realise Miss Y is likely to be disappointed with my decision, I've not recommended NatWest pay her further compensation.

My final decision

My final decision is that National Westminster Bank Public Limited Company do not need to take further action in relation to this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss Y to accept or reject my decision before 6 March 2026.

Victoria Blackwood
Ombudsman