

The complaint

Mr B complains that Scottish Equitable Plc trading as Aegon is no longer providing him with online access to his pension. And contributions haven't been applied. He says he cannot see the current state of his pension and due to the lack of online access he may have suffered a loss as he can't make changes to his investments without up-to-date information.

What happened

Our investigator set out the background to the complaint in his letter of recommendation, for ease of reference I have included an amended copy of this below

Mr B has a Group Personal Pension (GPP) with Aegon. This plan is linked to a business, of which Mr B is a director of. In January 2025, Mr B realised he didn't have access to his pension account via the online portal. When he contacted Aegon in February 2025, he was told that they were working on restoring access, but they didn't give Mr B a specific time frame for when this would be resolved. Mr B was concerned that he couldn't see his contributions. He wasn't sure whether these were being applied correctly and he had wider concerns about unit prices falling in the interim period. A formal complaint was lodged about the above issues. Mr B highlighted to Aegon this issue wasn't only one affecting him, but others at his workplace too.

Over the following months, Mr B chased up Aegon on when he would be able to access his pension online. Aegon's response remained the same, they apologised for the lack of access but could not provide a definitive timeframe for when online access would be restored.

Aegon didn't provide Mr B with a final response but directed him to come to our service, as the eight weeks they had to consider his complaint had passed. Mr B has since approached our service to get his online access restored.

In response to the complaint and our investigator's recommendation, Aegon told us that it is working on a solution to this issue which came about when its systems were upgraded. This upgrade caused unforeseen issues with contributions not applying correctly and online access being removed. But as this issue was affecting many of its customers, it unfortunately couldn't give a timescale to when this would be fixed. It said it had sent Mr B an annual statement in April 2025 and that this was correct – so Mr B did have that information to use as a guide to his plan's performance. It also said online access wasn't something it had promised as part of this plan but it understood that as it had been previously available it had set that expectation and it was trying to fix the issue it now had.

It said regarding a comment Mr B made about being told he could get an annuity quote but only if he paused contributions, that it was sorry if that information was given – although it couldn't find a record of this. As it had left the annuity market, this couldn't be the case. Mr B would have to approach another provider to buy an annuity, as it no longer offered annuities.

It agreed to the investigator's recommendation and understood Mr B's wish for a timescale but unfortunately it couldn't provide a reliable timescale as it didn't know how long this issue would take to fix.

The investigator had recommended an award of £400 for the trouble and upset caused to Mr B due to the ongoing issues with access to his plan and the uncertainty over the application of contributions. He said there was no evidence that Mr B had suffered a financial loss due to the problems he had incurred, and so the award was only to compensate Mr B for the trouble and upset this had caused him.

Mr B in response said that even though he feels the financial loss to him was considerably more than £400, it isn't really about the compensation. He said he was very disappointed about the investigator not setting a timescale for Aegon to return his online access and confirm the plan is fully up to date with all his contributions. Mr B feels until this happens, he cannot plan for his retirement, and this will leave him at a significant disadvantage.

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.

And having done so I have reached the same outcome as our investigator and for broadly the same reasons.

I appreciate Mr B and Aegon have made more detailed submissions than I have summarised above, but I don't think it is necessary to set them all out. This isn't meant as a dis-service to either party but my role is to decide what are the key issues and to get to the heart of the matter, to reach a fair and reasonable outcome. So whilst I haven't commented on all the points raised, they have been considered as part of the outcome I have reached.

I can completely understand Mr B's frustration at the current situation and that the matter remains unresolved. And I can see why he feels the trouble and upset award isn't the resolution he requires. But we are not the regulator, we cannot punish businesses, nor can we impose business wide sanctions or give directions on how to run a business. We will, when appropriate, liaise with the FCA to let them know of particular widespread issues but this isn't something we would usually comment on publicly or in a decision. So the investigator (and I) can only consider the impact on Mr B and whether he had suffered a tangible financial loss due to Aegon's actions. We could potentially in some circumstances say that a business should do something by a certain date and if not more compensation should be paid to a particular customer but this still would not resolve matters for Mr B. And I'm mindful that Aegon has explained this issue is affecting more than just Mr B and his particular GPP and it does not know when it will be fixed. So in these circumstances I think it is reasonable to consider the impact on Mr B now and if in the future this situation continues to cause Mr B problems (e.g Mr B has difficulty trying to take his benefits), Mr B will be able to bring a new complaint. I appreciate this is not the ideal solution but it is the only practical one, we cannot fix the issue for Aegon.

I can see that this issue has caused Mr B a lot of trouble, he says he has been calling Aegon monthly but isn't able to speak to anybody senior or closer to the issue than the front end call staff. And I can see that Aegon hasn't provided good customer service in terms of updates or information about the problem and what Mr B can do in the meantime, I have taken this into account as did the investigator when considering the award due. But it is fair to recognise that it hasn't provided Mr B a good level of customer service aside from the issue that has caused Mr B this trouble.

Aegon argues that online access doesn't form part of the product offering, it's not in the terms and conditions for example. And that I think has some merit although as it recognises, this is lessened by the fact it was providing this service before the system upgrade that caused these issues. But I don't think the lack of online access is the only problem here. I understand the contributions over more than a year have not been applied to the policy, therefore Mr B presumably cannot receive an up to date value even if he was to phone up and ask for one (or at least not immediately). Aegon has said it will of course apply the contributions (when this issue is fixed) so that there is no loss and at the date they should have been applied but I understand Mr B's argument that this doesn't help him now. That said, it isn't unusual for firms only to provide an annual statement – and it seems that Aegon has done this for 2025 and it says the values were correct (if Mr B still does not have a copy – we can send him a copy on his request). So presumably it was manually calculated to include the value of the missing contributions. If Aegon is able to do this then it is arguably the service it was providing before it set up online access, which as it says, was not a service it has to give to customers of this product.

Thinking about Mr B's situation, he does have access to his annual statement for the year which provides what Aegon says is the correct value. And on this statement his funds are listed, so he can look these funds up online to monitor the performance. So whilst it isn't as convenient as before, I don't think the problems that have occurred here should have much impact on Mr B's ability to consider the performance of his funds and make switches if he wishes to do so. With regards to his retirement, whilst he doesn't have access to an up-to-date value immediately, I would expect Aegon to be able to provide one on request – it was able to provide an up-to-date value for his annual statement. So if Mr B decides he wishes to look into retirement options, he should contact Aegon to provide him with the information he requires – if it is unable to provide that information and he wishes to complain we would then be able to consider the impact this has had on him. But at the moment it appears it is more an issue that Mr B is foreseeing rather than something tangible at the moment. As I said Mr B is able to look at the fund's performance online, if he is unsure of how to do so, Aegon will be able to provide this information. And if he needs a current value, I would expect Aegon to be able to provide this even if it's not immediately available.

So as I've said I appreciate this isn't the sort of resolution Mr B will have hoped for and it is not ideal for this situation to be ongoing and for us to be issuing a final decision having not resolved the key issue. But in the circumstances, there isn't really anything more we can do, other than make an award for the trouble and upset caused so far to Mr B. And to say that if in the future this same issue has further implications for him, that the chance to complain again and for the new issues to be considered will be open to him.

Putting things right

The fact that Mr B can no longer access his plan online must be frustrating for him but it isn't a promised feature of the plan he signed up for, so I don't think this issue alone carries a lot of weight in terms of the award. However, the customer service around this issue has been poor, Mr B hasn't been kept updated with events or provided with clear information about his options and how he can still access information about his plan through other methods. And the fact his contributions haven't been applied will have caused him stress. I think the award of £400 is within the boundaries of what I would consider fair and reasonable.

My final decision

For the reasons explained above, Scottish Equitable Plc trading as Aegon should put things right as I've set out.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B to accept or

reject my decision before 24 December 2025.

Simon Hollingshead
Ombudsman