

The complaint

M, a company, complains that its director, Mr M, was unable to log into the business USD (dollar) account with NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY (NatWest) for a period of some 31 months leading to losses for M.

Mr M, as sole director, makes the complaint on M's behalf.

What happened

Mr M opened a business account for M with NatWest on 22 December 2022. He found he was unable to register for online banking so he decided to use NatWest's Bankline service with a charge of £20 a month.

However he had problems using Bankline when trying to make a payment from the account, and following a 20 minute phone call with NatWest, he couldn't reset his details. He had to use an account with another bank for payments.

Mr M further needed to provide his accountant with the end of year accounts. However he wasn't able to download the necessary statements. He then had to make three 30 minute calls to NatWest and send an email to NatWest's CEO to get the information required. This took weeks to receive and he had to take pictures of 46 pages of the information to send to his accountant.

Mr M decided he wanted to close the account and transfer out the money. But when he tried to do this, he got an error message saying something went wrong and for him to contact Bankline support for help. The Bankline support advised him it was his computer. However Mr M says this wasn't the case and that he had tried three different devices with three different browsers.

Mr M then went into his local branch, where he had to complete forms and wait for two members of staff to do an international transfer. But he then received an email to tell him the transfer hadn't taken place because no transfer fees had been paid. Though Mr M says he wasn't advised of these fees. He spoke to Bankline Support in September 2024 (at the time he made his complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service) who said he could fax the forms to it.

NatWest explained that M's business bank account was opened within its five working day timescale. However, Mr M's request for online banking was declined in error and so he used its Bankline service instead. It said two USD accounts were successfully opened on 15 February 2023. It reviewed both USD account requests and found no bank errors with the opening of the accounts and said that the accounts had been well managed since then. Because of the problems with operating the online account and the difficulties in obtaining the statements, it offered £200 compensation.

Mr M tells us that he contacted NatWest in July 2025 and it managed to recreate his profile. He was then able to log in and transfer the money out, a substantial sum in USD

On referral to this Service, our Investigator noted that NatWest/Bankline hadn't provided evidence of what was needed to close the account nor details of Mr M's attempts to contact the helpline. It did provide information concerning Mr M's attempted logins to the account. He attempted to log in in September 2024 but didn't attempt to do so again until July 2025. Our Investigator proposed the following remedy:

- refund a year's worth of account fees,
- pay 5% interest for the time M was without the money and was unable to transfer it to a higher interest account, and
- pay additional compensation of £75 for the service received.

NatWest accepted this. Mr M didn't agree and said we hadn't addressed the prospective losses (which he had sent details of) M would have made during the time he was unable to transfer the money out.

Our Investigator said we can't award hypothetical losses.

Mr M didn't accept this and the matter was referred to me for an Ombudsman's review. I clarified the amount of interest to be \$1,668.69, as calculated by Mr M as of September 2024. NatWest accepted the proposed figure, though I haven't heard from Mr M about it.

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.

Where there is a dispute about what happened, I have based my decision on what I consider is most likely to have happened in the light of the evidence.

The parties accept that Mr M had difficulty logging into the business account. Mr M asserts that M was without its money for 31 months. Though the USD accounts were opened in February 2023. And he did say for a while the accounts ran smoothly – I've seen evidence that regular payments were received into the account up until September 2024. Although I accept that payments being credited is not the same as being able to log into and transfer monies out.

On the latter point I accept that Mr M had difficulties. It appears that he tried to close both USD accounts, one has a small sum in it, the other much more substantial sum. When he contacted the Bankline support in September 2024, it was suggested he send a fax, and though I take his point that faxes aren't generally used these days, as far as I'm aware a fax can be sent by computer. Nevertheless in light of the fact that Bankline has been unable to provide us with details of the calls Mr M made, I think it fair to accept our Investigator's review of the matter and award compensation accordingly.

In respect of calculating interest, the proposal was that this be for the period Mr M was unable to transfer the monies out. As this wasn't specified I think it's reasonable to accept Mr M's calculation of it as of September 2024. NatWest has told us that Mr M didn't attempt to log in after that. He was able to do this in July 2025, and this was a straightforward procedure. As set out above the interest payable is \$1,668.69 as per Mr M's calculation, which has been set out to both parties.

I think it's reasonable that NatWest refund 12 months' Bankline Fees. I believe M had the benefit of the account for at least some of the period it was open.

I further think, in light of the additional problems logging in that an increase in compensation of a further £75 on top of the £200 already offered, is justified.

In respect of business losses, I should clarify that I can only award compensation for actual losses, if caused by NatWest's error. I can't award what are essentially speculative losses. And I must also take account of the fact that some of these were during the period after September 2024 when Mr M in my view could have resolved the access to the account if he'd contacted NatWest/Bankline as he did in July 2025.

I should further clarify that we don't generally award legal costs incurred in pursuing a complaint, as this service is free for complainants to use. I don't think it's appropriate to award any such costs in this case.

Putting things right

NatWest should:

- refund to M twelve months' account fees in the sum of £240 (£20 x 12).
- pay 5% interest* for the time M was without its money in the sum of \$1,668.69.
- pay a total of £275 compensation, if any part of this has already been paid, then pay the balance.

*HM Revenue & Customs may require NatWest to deduct tax from any award of interest. It must give M a certificate showing how much tax has been taken off if it asks for one.

My final decision

I uphold the complaint and require NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY to provide the remedy set out under "Putting things right" above.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask M to accept or reject my decision before 3 March 2026.

Ray Lawley
Ombudsman