

The complaint

Mr S's complaint is, in essence, that Shawbrook Bank Limited (the 'Lender') acted unfairly and unreasonably by (1) being party to an unfair credit relationship with him under Section 140A of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 (as amended) (the 'CCA') and (2) deciding against paying claims under Section 75 of the CCA.

The timeshare in question was bought jointly by Mr and Mrs S, but as the loan used to finance the purchase was in Mr S's sole name, he is the only eligible complainant here. I will, however, refer to both Mr and Mrs S where it is appropriate to do so.

What happened

Mr and Mrs S were existing members of a timeshare provider (the 'Supplier') – having made five previous timeshare purchases from it between October 2013 and October 2017. But the product at the centre of this complaint is their membership of a timeshare that I'll call the 'Signature Collection' – which they bought on 7 June 2018 (the 'Time of Sale'). They entered into an agreement with the Supplier to buy 2,250 fractional points, and after trading in their existing signature fractional points, they ended up paying £11,549 for this new Signature Collection membership (the 'Purchase Agreement').

Signature Collection membership was asset backed – which meant it gave Mr and Mrs S more than just holiday rights. It included a share in the net sale proceeds of a property named on the Purchase Agreement (the 'Allocated Property') after their membership term ends. It also provided them with the guaranteed right to stay in the Allocated Property for a set week every year if they wished, or they could use their points towards other accommodation from the Supplier's portfolio of resorts.

Mr S paid for their Signature Collection membership by taking finance of £11,549 from the Lender (the 'Credit Agreement') in his sole name.

Mr and Mrs S's previous membership purchases from the Supplier are the subject of separate complaints, and are included here for background purposes only.

Mr S – using a professional representative (the 'PR') – wrote to the Lender on 28 July 2021 (the 'Letter of Complaint') to raise a number of different concerns about the Signature Collection membership and the associated Credit Agreement. As those concerns haven't changed since they were first raised, and as both sides are familiar with them, it isn't necessary to repeat them in detail here beyond the summary above.

The Lender did not send a substantive response to the complaint within the eight weeks required by the regulator, so the PR, on Mr S's behalf, referred his complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

Having been contacted by this Service, the Lender said it had not received the complaint and asked for the opportunity to answer Mr S's concerns. And having considered it, on 30 March 2023 the Lender sent its final response to the complaint, rejecting it on every ground.

Unhappy with this response, Mr S asked for the merits of his complaint to be assessed by this Service. It was assessed by an Investigator who, having considered the information on file, rejected the complaint on its merits.

Mr S disagreed with the Investigator's assessment and asked for an Ombudsman's decision – which is why it was passed to me.

As set out, Mr and Mrs S have made several timeshare purchases from the Supplier, all of which were funded by fixed-term loans. Complaints about these other purchases, and the associated credit relationships have been made, and I have considered them all separately in turn.

The complaint made here is, apart from the details of the sale and product, virtually identical to the complaints about the previous sales. And the evidence submitted to support the complaint, such as the testimony, is the same. So, although there is considerable duplication in the decisions, I'd like to reassure Mr S that all of the complaints have been considered on their own individual merits, whilst taking into account the wider circumstances of all of the sales.

The provisional decision

I considered the matter and issued a provisional decision (the 'PD') setting out my initial thoughts on the merits of Mr S's complaint.

In the PD I said:

"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 that, I do not currently think this complaint should be upheld.

However, before I explain why, I want to make it clear that my role as an Ombudsman is not to address every single point that has been made to date. Instead, it is to decide what is fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint. So, if I have not commented on, or referred to, something that either party has said, that does not mean I have not considered it.

Section 75 of the CCA: the Supplier's misrepresentations at the Time of Sale

The CCA introduced a regime of connected lender liability under section 75 that affords consumers ("debtors") a right of recourse against lenders that provide the finance for the acquisition of goods or services from third-party merchants ("suppliers") in the event that there is an actionable misrepresentation and/or breach of contract by the supplier.

Certain conditions must be met if the protection afforded to consumers is engaged, including, for instance, the cash price of the purchase and the nature of the arrangements between the parties involved in the transaction. The Lender doesn't dispute that the relevant conditions are met. But for reasons I'll come on to below, it isn't necessary to make any formal findings on them here.

It was said in the Letter of Complaint that Signature Collection membership had been misrepresented by the Supplier at the Time of Sale because Mr and Mrs S were:

- (1) Told by the Supplier that Signature Collection membership had a guaranteed end date when that was not true.*
- (2) Told by the Supplier that Signature Collection membership was an "investment" when*

that was not true.

However, telling prospective members that they were investing their money because they were buying a fraction or share of one of the Supplier's properties was not untrue. After all, a share in an allocated property was, by its very nature, an investment. And while, as I understand it, the sale of the Allocated Property could be postponed in certain circumstances according to the Signature Collection Rules, Mr S says little to nothing to persuade me that they were given a guarantee by the Supplier that the Allocated Property would be sold on a specific date when such a promise would have been impossible to stand by given the inevitable uncertainty of selling property some way into the future. And as there's nothing else on file to support the PR's allegation, I'm not persuaded that there was a representation by the Supplier on the issue in question that constituted a false statement of fact.

So, while I recognise that Mr S and the PR have concerns about the way in which Signature Collection membership was sold by the Supplier, when looking at the claim under Section 75 of the CCA, I can only consider whether there was a factual and material misrepresentation by the Supplier. For the reasons I've set out above, I'm not persuaded that there was. And that means that I don't think that the Lender acted unreasonably or unfairly when it dealt with this particular Section 75 claim.

Section 75 of the CCA: the Supplier's Breach of Contract

I have already summarised how Section 75 of the CCA works and why it gives consumers a right of recourse against a lender. So, it is not necessary to repeat that here other than to say that, if I find that the Supplier is liable for having breached the Purchase Agreement, the Lender is also liable.

Mr S says that they could not holiday where and when they wanted to – which, on my reading of the complaint, suggests that the Supplier was not living up to its end of the bargain, potentially breaching the Purchase Agreement.

Yet, like any holiday accommodation, availability was not unlimited – given the higher demand at peak times, like school holidays for instance. Some of the sales paperwork signed by Mr and Mrs S states that the availability of holidays was/is subject to demand, and it also looks like they made use of their fractional points to holiday on a number of occasions. So, whilst I accept that they may not have been able to take certain holidays, I have not seen enough to persuade me that the Supplier had breached the terms of the Purchase Agreement.

The PR also says on Mr S's behalf that the Supplier breached the Purchase Agreement because it went into liquidation. And if certain parts of the Supplier's business were put into administration, I can understand why the PR is alleging that there was a breach of the Purchase Agreement as a result. However, neither Mr S nor the PR have said, suggested or provided evidence to demonstrate that due to the administration they are no longer:

- *Members of the Signature Collection;*
- *able to use their Signature Collection membership to holiday in the same way they could initially; and*
- *entitled to a share in the net sales proceeds of the Allocated Property when their Signature Collection membership ends.*

So, from the evidence I have seen, I do not think the Lender is liable to pay Mr S any compensation for a breach of contract by the Supplier. And with that being the case, I do not

think the Lender acted unfairly or unreasonably in relation to this aspect of the complaint either.

Section 140A of the CCA: did the Lender participate in an unfair credit relationship?

I've already explained why I'm not persuaded that a claim under Section 75 of the CCA ought to succeed. But there are aspects of the sales process that, being the subject of dissatisfaction, I must explore with Section 140A in mind if I'm to consider this complaint in full – which is what I've done next.

Having considered the entirety of the credit relationship between Mr S and the Lender along with all of the circumstances of the complaint, I don't think the credit relationship between them was likely to have been rendered unfair for the purposes of Section 140A. When coming to that conclusion, and in carrying out my analysis, I have looked at:

- 1. The standard of the Supplier's commercial conduct – which includes its sales and marketing practices at the Time of Sale along with any relevant training material;*
- 2. The provision of information by the Supplier at the Time of Sale, including the contractual documentation and disclaimers made by the Supplier;*
- 3. Evidence provided by both parties on what was likely to have been said and/or done at the Time of Sale; and*
- 4. The inherent probabilities of the sale given its circumstances.*

I have then considered the impact of these on the fairness of the credit relationship between Mr S and the Lender.

The Supplier's sales & marketing practices at the Time of Sale

Mr S's complaint about the Lender being party to an unfair credit relationship was and is made for several reasons.

The PR says, for instance that:

- The right checks weren't carried out before the Lender lent to Mr S; and*
- Mr and Mrs S were pressured by the Supplier into purchasing Signature Collection membership at the Time of Sale.*

However, as things currently stand, neither of these strike me as reasons why this complaint should succeed. I'll explain.

I haven't seen anything to persuade me that the right checks weren't carried out by the Lender given this complaint's circumstances. But even if I were to find that the Lender failed to do everything it should have when it agreed to lend (and I make no such finding), I would have to be satisfied that the money lent to Mr S was actually unaffordable, before also concluding that he lost out as a result, and then consider whether the credit relationship with the Lender was unfair to him for this reason. But from the information provided, I am not satisfied that the lending was unaffordable for Mr S.

And as regards the allegation that they were put under undue pressure, I acknowledge that Mr and Mrs S may have felt weary after a sales process that went on for a long time. But they say little about what was said and/or done by the Supplier during their sales presentation that made them feel as if they had no choice but to purchase Signature Collection membership when they simply did not want to. They were also given a 14-day

cooling off period and they have not provided a credible explanation for why they did not cancel their membership during that time. This was also their sixth purchase from the Supplier, so I think it is a fair assumption to make that they would have likely known how the Supplier sold its products. And with all of that being the case, there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that Mr and Mrs S made the decision to purchase Signature Collection membership because their ability to exercise that choice was significantly impaired by pressure from the Supplier.

Overall, therefore, I don't think that Mr S's credit relationship with the Lender was rendered unfair to him under Section 140A for any of the reasons above. But there is another reason, perhaps the main reason, why the PR now says the credit relationship with the Lender was unfair to Mr S. And that's the suggestion that Signature Collection membership was marketed and sold to him and Mrs S as an investment in breach of prohibition against selling timeshares in that way.

The Supplier's alleged breach of Regulation 14(3) of the Timeshare Regulations

A share in the Allocated Property clearly constituted an investment as it offered Mr and Mrs S the prospect of a financial return – whether or not, like all investments, that was more than what they first put into it. But it is important to note at this stage that the fact that Signature Collection membership included an investment element did not, itself, transgress the prohibition in Regulation 14(3). That provision prohibits the marketing and selling of a timeshare contract as an investment. It doesn't prohibit the mere existence of an investment element in a timeshare contract or prohibit the marketing and selling of such a timeshare contract per se.

In other words, the Timeshare Regulations did not ban products such as the Signature Collection. They just regulated how such products were marketed and sold.

To conclude, therefore, that Signature Collection membership was marketed or sold to Mr and Mrs S as an investment in breach of Regulation 14(3), I have to be persuaded that it was more likely than not that the Supplier marketed and/or sold membership to them as an investment, i.e. told them or led them to believe that Signature Collection membership offered them the prospect of a financial gain (i.e., a profit) given the facts and circumstances of this complaint.

And there is competing evidence in this complaint as to whether Signature Collection membership was marketed and/or sold by the Supplier at the Time of Sale as an investment in breach of Regulation 14(3) of the Timeshare Regulations.

On the one hand, it is clear that the Supplier made efforts to avoid specifically describing membership of the Signature Collection as an 'investment' or quantifying to prospective purchasers, such as Mr and Mrs S, the financial value of their share in the net sales proceeds of the Allocated Property along with the investment considerations, risks and rewards attached to them.

But on the other hand, I acknowledge that the Supplier's sales process left open the possibility that the sales representative may have positioned Signature Collection membership as an investment. So, I accept that it's equally possible that Signature Collection membership was marketed and sold to Mr and Mrs S as an investment in breach of Regulation 14(3).

However, whether or not there was a breach of the relevant prohibition by the Supplier is not ultimately determinative of the outcome in this complaint for reasons I will come on to shortly. And with that being the case, it's not necessary to make a formal finding on that

particular issue for the purposes of this decision.

Was the credit relationship between the Lender and the Consumer rendered unfair?

Having found that it was possible that the Supplier breached Regulation 14(3) of the Timeshare Regulations at the Time of Sale, I now need to consider what impact that breach (if there was one) had on the fairness of the credit relationship between Mr S and the Lender under the Credit Agreement and related Purchase Agreement, as the case law on Section 140A makes it clear that regulatory breaches do not automatically create unfairness for the purposes of that provision. Such breaches and their consequences (if there are any) must be considered in the round, rather than in a narrow or technical way.

Indeed, it seems to me that, if I am to conclude that a breach of Regulation 14(3) led to a credit relationship between Mr S and the Lender that was unfair to him and warranted relief as a result, whether the Supplier's breach of Regulation 14(3) led him and Mrs S to enter into the Purchase Agreement and him into the Credit Agreement is an important consideration.

But on my reading of the evidence before me, the prospect of a financial gain from Signature Collection membership was not an important and motivating factor when Mr and Mrs S decided to go ahead with their purchase. I'm simply not persuaded that was the case. I'll explain.

As part of Mr S's submissions to this Service, the PR sent us a statement in his name, setting out his recollections of his and Mrs S's entire relationship with the Supplier, from their first fractional points purchase in 2013, up to their last at the Time of Sale.

As regards their Signature Collection purchase at the Time of Sale he said:

"On holiday in Mainland Spain in June 2018 we were invited to an update meeting where we had a complimentary breakfast, When we arrived it was quite clear what this was it was another sales opportunity for them, even though [sic] we had stated we did not want to purchase anything. We went for a tour of this and we purchased more points for an upgrade on our existing Signature Suites this would mean we had Penthouse now. We did feel pressured into this as we thought it would be a good opportunity especially as it was an investment, we were advised was fractional ownership so we believed in good faith that this would be a good option at the time."

On my reading of this, Mr and Mrs S upgraded from their existing signature membership because they liked the idea of their Allocated Property being upgraded to a penthouse. They have said that it was presented as an investment, but they haven't said that it was the investment element – i.e. the potential profit from the sale of the Allocated Property – that was their motivation to make the purchase. And when looking at what they have said about why they bought their earlier signature membership (which was traded in towards the purchase being considered here they said:

"When we were on holiday in 2015, we were invited to an update meeting with [sic] transpired into a sales presentation in relation to the Signature Apartment and purchasing more fractional points would allow us to have access to use them when on holiday. If we did not use them ourselves, we were advised that we would be able to rent these [sic] out and the money for this would help with paying the maintenance fee. This seemed like a good opportunity for investment and for holidays. We did feel under pressure, as this offer was only on the table for the day. So, at this point when they advised that we could rent them out, this we noted showed that [the Supplier] was not exclusive because they were renting these apartments to non-members if they personally

did not use the weeks. The representative advised that purchasing these additional points would improve availability, this was not the case. At the time of purchase the product originally with [the Supplier] we were promised that it was exclusive and would be guaranteed availability, this proved not to be the case.”

Again, this does not suggest to me that this earlier signature membership was bought for the potential profit it could give them at the end of the term either.

The PR has said that Mr S has told it that each time he made a purchase he was told that it was an investment, and this is supported by what Mr S has said about what happened at the Time of Sale. But as I've said, just because there may have been a breach of the prohibition on selling timeshare memberships as investments, does not automatically create unfairness for the purposes of Section 140A of the CCA. I need to be persuaded that that breach was material to the decision Mr and Mrs S made to purchase the Signature Collection membership at the Time of Sale.

And I am not persuaded that is the case. I think they bought the upgraded Signature Collection for the improved penthouse property it would provide them to stay in. And my thoughts on this are strengthened when I think about the likely reasons why Mr and Mrs S made their other timeshare purchases over time. From what they have said about their reasons for purchasing the others, I am not persuaded that any of them were bought because of the potential for a profit. It seems likely they were all bought for the holidays they thought they would provide.

That doesn't mean they weren't interested in a share in the Allocated Property. After all, that wouldn't be surprising given the nature of the product at the centre of this complaint. But as Mr S himself doesn't persuade me that their purchase of the Signature Collection was motivated by their share in the Allocated Property and the possibility of a profit, I don't think a breach of Regulation 14(3) by the Supplier was likely to have been material to the decision they ultimately made.

On balance, therefore, even if the Supplier had marketed or sold the Signature Collection membership as an investment in breach of Regulation 14(3) of the Timeshare Regulations, I am not persuaded that Mr and Mrs S's decision to purchase Signature Collection membership at the Time of Sale was motivated by the prospect of a financial gain (i.e., a profit). On the contrary, I think the evidence suggests they would have pressed ahead with their purchase whether or not there had been a breach of Regulation 14(3), because it provided a guaranteed week's accommodation in their upgraded Allocated Property, which was now a penthouse. And for that reason, I do not think the credit relationship between Mr S and the Lender was unfair to him even if the Supplier had breached Regulation 14(3).

The provision of information by the Supplier at the Time of Sale

The PR says that Mr and Mrs S were not given sufficient information at the Time of Sale by the Supplier in order to make an informed choice.

It isn't clear what information the PR thinks the Supplier failed to provide at the Time of Sale. But as I've already indicated, the case law on Section 140A makes it clear that it does not automatically follow that regulatory breaches create unfairness for the purposes of the unfair relationship provisions. The extent to which such mistakes render a credit relationship unfair must also be determined according to their impact on the complainant.

So, while I acknowledge that it is possible that the Supplier did not give Mr and Mrs S sufficient information, in good time, in order to satisfy the requirements of Regulation 12 of the Timeshare Regulations (which was concerned with the provision of 'key information'),

even if that was the case, neither Mr S nor the PR have persuaded me that they were deprived of information that would have led them to make a different purchasing decision at the Time of Sale. And with that being the case, even if there were information failings (which I make no formal finding on), I can't see why they led to a financial loss for Mr S.

Mr S's Commission Complaint

*I note that one of Mr S's other concerns relates to alleged payments of commission by the Lender to the Supplier for acting as a credit broker and arranging the Credit Agreement. The Supreme Court's recent judgment *Johnson v FirstRand Bank Ltd, Wrench v FirstRand Bank Ltd and Hopcraft v Close Brothers Ltd* [2025] UKSC 33 ('Johnson, Wrench and Hopcraft') clarified the law on payments of commission – albeit in the context of car dealers acting as credit brokers. In my view, the Supreme Court's judgment sets out principles which appear capable of applying to credit brokers other than car dealer–credit brokers. So, once the implications of that judgment become clear, I will finalise my findings on this complaint.*

Conclusion

In conclusion, as things currently stand, I do not think that the Lender acted unfairly or unreasonably when it dealt with the relevant Section 75 claims, and if I put the issue of commission to one side for the time being, I am not persuaded that the Lender was party to a credit relationship with Mr S under the Credit Agreement that was unfair to him for the purposes of Section 140A of the CCA – nor do I see any other reason why it would be fair or reasonable to direct the Lender to compensate Mr S.

But, as I've already said, once the implications of Johnson, Wrench and Hopcraft become clear, I will finalise my findings on this complaint."

The responses to the provisional decision

The Lender responded to the PD and accepted it, and provided details of the commission that it had paid to the Supplier. The PR, on Mr S's behalf, did not accept it, but provided no further evidence that it wished me to consider.

Following this, and further to my PD, I set out to both sides why I was not persuaded that Mr S's credit relationship with the Lender was unfair to him for reasons relating to the commission arrangements between it and the Supplier. The PR responded to say it had nothing further to add.

Having received the relevant responses from both sides, I am now finalising my decision.

The legal and regulatory context

In considering what is fair and reasonable in all the circumstances of the complaint, I am required under DISP 3.6.4R to take into account: relevant (i) law and regulations; (ii) regulators' rules, guidance and standards; and (iii) codes of practice; and (where appropriate), what I consider to have been good industry practice at the relevant time.

The legal and regulatory context that I think is relevant to this complaint is, in many ways, no different to that shared in several hundred published ombudsman decisions on very similar complaints – which can be found on the Financial Ombudsman Service's website. And with that being the case, it is not necessary to set out that context in detail here. But I would add that the following regulatory rules/guidance are also relevant:

The Consumer Credit Sourcebook ('CONC') – Found in the Financial Conduct Authority's (the 'FCA') Handbook of Rules and Guidance

Below are the most relevant provisions and/or guidance as they were at the relevant time:

- CONC 3.7.3 [R]
- CONC 4.5.3 [R]
- CONC 4.5.2 [G]

The FCA's Principles

The rules on consumer credit sit alongside the wider obligations of firms, such as the Principles for Businesses ('PRIN'). Set out below are those that are most relevant to this complaint:

- Principle 6
- Principle 7
- Principle 8

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.

Following the responses from both sides, I've considered the case afresh. And having done so, and because no new evidence has been submitted or arguments made in response to my initial findings, I see no reason to depart from the outcome as set out in the provisional decision above.

Given the facts and circumstances of this complaint, I do not think that the Lender acted unfairly or unreasonably when it dealt with Mr S's Section 75 claims, and I am not persuaded that the Lender was party to a credit relationship with him under the Credit Agreement that was unfair to him for the purposes of Section 140A of the CCA. And having taken everything into account, I see no other reason why it would be fair or reasonable to direct the Lender to compensate Mr S.

My final decision

I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 11 February 2026.

Chris Riggs
Ombudsman