

The complaint

Mr A complains that Computershare Investor Services Plc failed to properly acknowledge and investigate an incorrect cost basis shown for the shares he held in his employee Share Incentive Plan (SIP).

Mr A says this error, and the delay in addressing it, affected his ability to make informed financial decisions and led to missed investment opportunities.

What happened

Mr A had been enrolled into an employee SIP since 2002 with a business that he was employed by, that I shall call 'Firm X'. In 2023, Mr A left employment with Firm X and in July 2023, 810.863554 SIP shares were transferred to his Share Plan Account with Computershare.

Firm X Share Plan Accounts are referred to as a ShareShop within Computershare's EquatePlus system. When viewing details of the 810.863554 shares allocated to Mr A's ShareShop on 26 July 2023, the purchase price (cost basis) of these shares was incorrectly showing as \$84.94110.

Mr A contacted the EquatePlus helpdesk in July 2024 to query why the cost basis for these shares was showing a different figure to the share price detailed on the public register for the same date. The cost basis was showing as \$84.94110 per share, and the share price for this stock class on 26 July 2023 was showing as \$105.29.

The EquatePlus team didn't answer Mr A's query in full, so shortly afterwards, he decided to formally complain to Computershare. In summary, he said there was an inaccurate cost basis showing within his ShareShop. He expressed concern that the inaccurate information was preventing him from trading as, if he sold the shares with the wrong cost basis information, the wrong capital gains figures would be reflected for tax purposes.

Having looked at Mr A's concerns, it was found that the cost basis of \$84.94110 was a consequence of a currency conversion issue; this should have been either £84.94110 or \$105.29. Computershare explained that the error occurred due to the transfer from the SIP to the ShareShop, where the preferred currency of Mr A's EquatePlus account was GBP, but Firm X shares are traded in USD.

Computershare arranged for the correction of the cost basis within Mr A's ShareShop, and then contacted him to explain that the correct price was reflected in the system. To apologise for the inconvenience caused, Computershare explained that they were offering him a £100 goodwill gesture in recognition of the error.

In response, Mr A explained to Computershare that the £100 did not cover the losses he'd suffered as he'd planned to invest his monies into a government bond scheme. As the bond scheme enrolment was open between August and October 2023, and Computershare were

not made aware of the issue until July 2024, they decided to not uphold this element of his complaint.

Mr A was unhappy with Computershare's response, so he referred his complaint to this service. In summary, he said:

- They had incorrectly calculated capital gains tax on shares by 30%.
- They had conflated USD to GBP in error.
- Repeatedly denied that their calculation was incorrect, which led to alternative financial decisions being made to meet capital gains tax rules.
- Their online communication portal and live chat failed to comprehend the issue, adding delays to the issue getting resolved.
- Their initial responses to the problem were wholly inadequate and unrelated to the issue.
- The £100 goodwill gesture does not compensate him for his financial losses and the time taken to resolve such a simple error.
- He is concerned that there may be many previous experiences of incorrect calculations which could be detrimental to other plan holders.

Mr A stated that Computershare's misinformation about there being a 30% capital gains influenced his decision not to reinvest in alternative savings.

When submitting their file to this service, Computershare explained that Mr A had not been compensated for any difference in share price (which was the original issue complained about), as they considered that they had not prevented Mr A from trading. They went on to say that the ability to sell his ShareShop shares on the EquatePlus platform had never been taken away.

In addition, Computershare also said that Mr A has not submitted any trade of shares since the issue was brought to Computershare's attention in July 2024. Upon further review of the case, Computershare went on to say that they had identified that although Mr A's complaint relating to delays in trading his shares was not upheld, their overall handling of his complaint could have been better.

The complaint was then considered by one of our Investigators. She concluded that Computershare hadn't treated Mr A fairly, but given that they had now corrected the issue, they'd done enough to put things right for him.

Mr A, however, disagreed with our Investigator's findings. In summary, he said:

- Computershare have stated that they didn't miscalculate the capital gains on his shares, but their email admits that they did.
- Computershare also say that by incorrectly using \$84.9411 as part of the capital gains statement, did not result in a 30% error but their spreadsheet clearly shows that it did.
- It took him a year before Computershare understood, admitted and corrected the error.

Our Investigator was not persuaded to change her view as she didn't believe Mr A had presented any new arguments she'd not already considered or responded to. Unhappy with

that outcome, Mr A then asked the Investigator to pass the case to an Ombudsman 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 have summarised this complaint in less detail than Mr A has done and I've done so using my own words. The purpose of my decision isn't to address every single point raised by all of the parties involved. If there's something I've not mentioned, it isn't because I've ignored it - I haven't. I'm satisfied that I don't need to comment on every individual argument to be able to reach what I think is the right outcome. No discourtesy is intended by this; our rules allow me to do this and it simply reflects the informal nature of our service as a free alternative to the courts.

My role is to consider the evidence presented by Mr A and Computershare in order to reach what I think is an independent, fair and reasonable decision based on the facts of the case. In deciding what's fair and reasonable, I must consider the relevant law, regulation and best industry practice. Where there's conflicting information about what happened and gaps in what we know, my role is to weigh up the evidence we do have, but it is for me to decide, based on the available information that I've been given, what's more likely than not to have happened. And, having done so, I'm upholding Mr A's complaint, but I won't be instructing Computershare to do anything beyond what they've already offered – whilst it's largely for the same reasons as our Investigator, I'll explain why below.

What's at the heart of Mr A's complaint, is that the cost basis information that was shown on his Computershare account was wrong and that, he says, prevented him from selling his holding. Computershare have provided screenshots of Mr A's account showing that in July 2023, the cost basis of his shares was noted as \$84.9411. However, whilst the figure of 84.9411 was correct as a GBP amount, it was incorrectly labelled as USD. This mislabelling created the impression of an inflated capital gain. In short, when Mr A's Firm X shares were moved into his SIP on 26 July 2023, the underlying share price was £84.9411.

The confusion appears to have come about as a consequence of the underlying shares being traded in USD (as Firm X is an American listed company), rather than the figures being presented on his account in GBP. So, I can see why Mr A may have felt reluctant to want to sell his shares when there was a possibility that he may have faced a capital gain's liability, but from what I understand and putting aside the incorrect currency, the 84.911 was Mr A's understanding of the cost price of his shares.

From what I've seen of the evidence presented to this service, Mr A initially identified there might be a problem with his account on 23 July 2024, when he reached out to Computershare. After various exchanges between him and Computershare, they eventually resolved the issue and corrected his SIP on 14 September 2024, some c54 days later. Computershare updated Mr A's account to reflect the cost basis of the shares to \$105.29.

When a business makes a mistake, we'd ordinarily expect them to put the consumer back into the same, or as close to the same position that they would've been in were it not for the error, and it seems to me that Computershare have done just that. Whilst I appreciate that Mr A had to clarify his concerns to Computershare on a number of occasions to have his point understood, this issue was ultimately corrected with the USD currency reflected on his SIP in mid-September 2024.

Mr A has stated that he was considering investing in the same one year guaranteed growth bond that his wife took out in August 2023 at a rate of 6.2% p.a. He's provided details of that investment along with the returns offered at that time. However, for me to be able to instruct Computershare to pay Mr A that return (or anything else), I'd need to be satisfied that he was prevented from accessing that investment by Computershare's actions, but that threshold hasn't been met. From what I've seen of that particular National Savings & Investments product, that limited edition offering was only available until early October 2023, but Mr A didn't raise his concerns with Computershare until July 2024, which is well after that product closed.

In October 2024, Mr A explained that he didn't ask for the full financial impact to be compensated at 6.2%; it was an example of what was available in the market at the time, of which, there were many other products with similar returns. Whilst I appreciate Mr A may not have been initially aware that there was an issue with the cost basis of his shares, so in turn, that may have ruled out any immediate desire to want to sell his holding (because of capital gains tax implications), had he been minded to seek better returns elsewhere, he could of at least sold *some* of his shares to access, for example, the 6.2% offered by the National Savings & Investments bond, but he chose not to.

I've not seen anything to suggest that Computershare prevented Mr A from either accessing his account, or selling his shares, or at least potentially selling a limited number of them and there's no evidence within the file presented to me that Mr A was minded to liquidate his holding at any point to benefit from investment opportunities elsewhere, so I can't reasonably conclude that he should be compensated for any financial loss as a result of the misstated currency on his SIP.

When this service considers the impact an issue has had on a consumer, we don't just look at any financial consequences that followed, we also consider the wider trouble and upset that they've caused. It's clear to me that Mr A had to contact Computershare on a number of occasions to get his point across and it took them nearly two months to remedy the matter. Mr A says he's found the process incredibly frustrating. Computershare have already offered to pay Mr A £100 to apologise and having carefully considered matters, I'm satisfied that amount is at a level that I would've instructed them to pay him had they not already offered to do so. This amount reflects the inconvenience and frustration caused, which I consider proportionate given the circumstances.

Mr A has explained that he's also concerned about the impact this issue may have on other consumers with shares in Firm X. However, it's not the role of this service to direct Computershare to check other accounts to ensure that the issues haven't been repeated elsewhere. We're a quick and informal dispute resolution service and our role is to resolve individual disputes, not to oversee firms' wider practices; that responsibility lies with the Financial Conduct Authority.

My final decision

Computershare Investor Services Plc have already made an offer to pay Mr A £100 to settle the complaint and I think that is fair and reasonable in all of the circumstances.

So, my decision is that Computershare Investor Services Plc should pay Mr A £100 if they've not already done so.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr A to accept or reject my decision before 26 January 2026.

Simon Fox
Ombudsman