

The complaint

Ms O complains about the way that National Westminster Bank Public Limited Company dealt with a cheque she wanted to pay into her account and the service it provided.

What happened

Ms O explains that she was abroad and received a cheque for Euros 280. She spoke to NatWest on 13 May 2025 about not being able to pay this into her account using the banking app. She posted the cheque to NatWest as instructed. Ms O says she needed to pay bills and didn't receive the money and had to complain.

NatWest said that it wasn't able to process cheques that weren't in sterling through the app. But it apologised for the inconvenience. NatWest said that after it received the cheque it had sent this to a branch for security checks. But that it had been lost in transit. It had discussed the impact with Ms O and agreed to pay her the sterling amount of the cheque at £242.72, pay her the compensation of £700 she asked for and refund/ waive three bank charges of £1.55. All the money was credited to her account on 30 July 2025.

Our investigator didn't recommend that NatWest do anything further. She noted that Ms O had also been paid £25 in compensation on 13 May 2025 for poor service when she called about the cheque. And she said that she could only look at issues Ms O had raised with NatWest in this complaint.

She noted that NatWest set out on its website that it can take some 12 weeks for the process of collection of a foreign cheque. And our investigator said that based on this and the likely postage time the cheque may not have cleared until 11 August 2025. There was a record that the cheque had been sent by the central team to a branch on 30 May 2025 but no further information about the cheque.

Our investigator said that the compensation paid reflected the upset caused to Ms O by the conflicting information given to her. And the extent to which Ms O had to contact NatWest further to find out what was happening. There was no requirement for NatWest to cover the amount of the missing cheque as Ms O could have asked the business giving it to her for a replacement or for payment in a different way. In any event NatWest had paid Ms O the amount of the cheque and within the timescale she might otherwise have received the money. So, she didn't think that there was an obligation for NatWest to cover the costs claimed by Ms O including having to buy a more expensive weekly rather than a monthly travel pass, for her unpaid bills and related arrears and other expenses. Our investigator said that the overall amount paid was fair.

Ms O didn't agree and wanted her complaint to be reviewed by an ombudsman. She said that the compensation didn't reflect the stress to her and the inappropriate way she was spoken to and the phone being put down on her. Ms O said she wasn't in her right mind when she spoke to NatWest about compensation. There was a 'domino' effect of not receiving the money which included her not being able to travel back. And Ms O had to do all

the follow up about the cheque which wasn't right. Ms O explained that she required the funds urgently and emphasised the personal impact for her and stress caused.

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 listened to the call recordings provided by NatWest. During the call on 13 May 2025, it took nearly 12 minutes before Ms O was told that her attempts to use the app to credit the cheque wouldn't be successful. But also, that the process for clearing a non-sterling cheque could take up to 12 weeks as set out on the NatWest website. And that first Ms O would need to post the cheque to NatWest here.

I'm clear about how much that Ms O needed these funds. And that she made many calls to follow this up. Notably during calls on 11 and 12 June 2025 she was told that the cheque had been returned to a branch for security checks. It wasn't made clear to her then that the cheque had been lost. But there was a discussion about whether she could try and receive the payment from the business that had given her the cheque in a different way.

Ms O discussed compensation with NatWest and an amount seemed to have been agreed upon on 30 July 2025. Ms O then said that not having the funds had caused further expenses and arrears of £300. She discussed the stress caused to her and the poor service received. NatWest said it could issue an offer letter on the complaint for her to consider and if necessary, she could then refer to this service. I can see why Ms O said she felt pressured into agreeing even though I don't consider that was the intention of NatWest. And she didn't then want to have to follow the route of escalating her complaint. So, although Ms O said her claim was worth thousands, she said she would accept £700, a figure she'd put forward. And also wanted in particular the amount of the cheque credited on that day. All the compensation was in her account on 30 July 2025.

My assessment

In my assessment Ms O reasonably knew that it could take some time for the cheque to be credited after it had been received by NatWest in the post. I can't say how quickly it would otherwise have been credited if it hadn't been lost and I note that NatWest intended to carry out security checks in line with its process.

Ms O had the funds within the timescale that would otherwise have been allowed for had the cheque been collected and cleared. I don't find Ms O ought to have been able to make payments earlier and avoid any items being returned on her account. And so, I don't consider that NatWest was fairly responsible for the expenses Ms O has set out.

NatWest has already compensated Ms O for the amount of the cheque. Had it not done so I might have wanted to see evidence that it couldn't say be reissued or that payment wasn't possible at all from the business involved.

I'm clear that Ms O received poor service from NatWest throughout the process. The staff she spoke to didn't adequately assist her. And the process failed. The cheque was lost and no action by NatWest was taken to deal with that and help Ms O. Instead, I'm in agreement with Ms O that she had to follow this up at every stage and didn't know the cheque was lost. NatWest knew that this was causing her financial issues. I don't doubt that this all caused her stress and considerable inconvenience with the multiple calls. I can also understand in

light of her financial position why she just wanted this sorted out.

We publish guidance about compensation for distress and inconvenience and I've taken that into account here. We don't make punitive awards. I think that this matter caused Ms O considerable distress and inconvenience that took extra effort to resolve and lasted many weeks. As I explained above, I don't have a basis to find that she would otherwise not have had the expenses she's set out.

NatWest has already made and paid an offer of total compensation to Ms O. I think that is fair in light of my findings. And I need to say that I might not otherwise have awarded as much compensation for the reasons I've already given. So, I don't consider there's a reasonable basis to require NatWest to pay Ms O anything more. I know she'll be disappointed by my conclusions. If she doesn't accept my decision, she's free to pursue this matter in court and subject to any relevant timescales.

My final decision

My decision is that I do not uphold this complaint in the sense that National Westminster Bank Public Limited Company need not take any further action.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms O to accept or reject my decision before 15 May 2026.

Michael Crewe
Ombudsman