

## **The complaint**

Mr C complained about NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY ('NatWest') not sending him notification when it blocked his card payments. He said this had been happening repeatedly for more than a decade. He also complained about NatWest failing to respond to his complaint within the required timescale.

## **What happened**

When Mr C complained to NatWest, it said:

- his card was blocked on 3 October 2025 when the transaction was flagged for fraud checks. The usual SMS notification NatWest sent to customers when this happened couldn't be sent as the contact number held for Mr C was a non-UK number – and its system wasn't set up to send text messages to non-UK phone numbers.
- The card restriction was removed when Mr C confirmed the transaction was genuine.
- It was sorry about any confusion – NatWest was continually reviewing its systems but couldn't provide any details about 'fixing' this issue and the system was working as designed.
- It hadn't provided a complaint response within agreed timescales for which NatWest apologised.
- NatWest paid Mr C £75 by way of apology for trouble and upset he'd experienced as a result of poor service.

Our investigator thought that NatWest had dealt with Mr C's complaint fairly and reasonably and didn't recommend that it needed to do anything more.

Mr C disagreed with our investigator, mainly saying that he wanted the matter to be considered by an Ombudsman, given that his complaint raised wider implications for overseas customers using UK banking services. So the complaint came to me for a final 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've listened to the call recording provided when Mr C contacted NatWest about the blocked payment. I can appreciate why Mr C found the situation frustrating, particularly as he says similar problems have arisen before. But my role here is limited to looking at the matters NatWest addressed in its final response sent in December 2025. I can't widen my investigation to cover historic events or wider concerns about NatWest's arrangements for customers living overseas.

### The blocked transaction on 3 October 2025

NatWest is required to operate fraud-prevention systems to protect customers and comply with regulatory obligations. Its systems identified the need for further checks before Mr C's payment could be authorised. The terms and conditions of the account, which Mr C would've agreed to in order to be able to operate the account, allow NatWest to block a payment while completing checks.

Mr C feels the transaction shouldn't reasonably have been flagged given the organisation he was paying. But fraud controls assess information from a range of sources and assess a number of risks – I wouldn't expect the status of the recipient to be the sole determining factor. And financial businesses are not expected to disclose the specific criteria used in their fraud-detection systems, as doing so could compromise system integrity and effectiveness.

In these circumstances, I'm satisfied NatWest acted fairly and reasonably when it blocked the payment pending confirmation.

### Not receiving SMS text messages

Mr C lives overseas and NatWest's automated fraud-alert system does not send SMS notifications to non-UK numbers. Although the call-handler was able to send a manual text during the call on 3 October, that doesn't mean NatWest can automatically deliver system-generated alerts to international numbers.

The design of a bank's systems is primarily a matter for the business and the regulator - the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). So it's not up to me to tell NatWest it must develop a new system to enable automatically generated fraud alerts to go to customers whose contact details are outside the UK. NatWest has said it continually reviews its systems so it's possible that this may change in future. But there's no evidence NatWest treated Mr C unfairly or unreasonably simply because its automatic alerts cannot currently be delivered abroad.

### NatWest's admitted poor service

NatWest acknowledged that it could've managed Mr C's expectations about this situation more effectively and it failed to meet the expected timescale for replying to his complaint.

Mr C has said he's not seeking a different outcome or additional redress but I'd like to assure him that the £75 compensation already paid is in line with what I would have awarded. It fairly reflects the inconvenience and upset caused by these shortcomings in the service provided (as opposed to the upset resulting from his card being blocked and not receiving an alert – which isn't a reason for me to award any compensation). There is no evidence Mr C suffered financial loss, so I'm not awarding further compensation.

I appreciate that my decision will be disappointing for Mr C but I hope that setting things out as I've done helps to explain how I've reached my conclusions.

**My final decision**

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint as I am satisfied that NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY has already paid fair compensation to Mr C.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr C to accept or reject my decision before 23 March 2026.

Susan Webb  
**Ombudsman**