

The complaint

Mrs W has complained about how National Westminster Bank Public Limited Company (NatWest) handled a refund claim she made.

What happened

As all parties are familiar with this complaint, I'll only summarise the key background where necessary within my findings below.

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 read and considered the evidence submitted by the parties but won't comment on it all – only the matters I consider to be central to this complaint. This isn't intended as a discourtesy but reflects my role in resolving disputes informally.

It's important to note that NatWest aren't the provider of the services here – so in deciding what is fair and reasonable, I'm looking at their role as a provider of financial services. In doing so I note that because Mrs W paid for these transactions using a NatWest debit card, a chargeback claim could possibly help her. So in deciding what is fair and reasonable I've focused on this.

As a summary, Mrs W's debit card was used for several transactions to a supplier I shall call 'F' in April 2025. Mrs W has said that she has never purchased any services from F and that while they claim they provide various communication solutions, she believes they are linked to an unlicensed casino.

Chargeback

Chargeback is the process by which settlement disputes are resolved between card issuers and merchants. A consumer isn't entitled to chargeback by right. But where there are grounds to raise one and it has reasonable grounds for success, it is good practice for one to be raised by the card issuer.

However, a chargeback isn't guaranteed to succeed and is governed by the limitations of the particular card scheme rules (in this case Mastercard). I've considered the relevant chargeback rules in deciding whether NatWest acted fairly.

A chargeback may be appropriate where a consumer disputes a transaction they authorised, for example because the service wasn't provided as agreed.

In this case, the transactions were authenticated using 3D secure. This is a form of additional verification used by the card issuer to confirm the payment.

NatWest raised a chargeback under the card issuer reason code 'Goods or Services Not Provided'. F disputed this and said that their services had been provided. They explained they are a copywriting and marketing services business, not a casino. They also provided evidence to show an account was created, their terms accepted, and that the service was accessed and used following the transactions, which were completed using 3D secure.

Mrs W has said she didn't register any services with F, that some of the personal details provided didn't match hers, and that she didn't receive any confirmation of the service. I've considered these points. However, I haven't seen any evidence to show F's information is unreliable or the service wasn't provided.

Mrs W has said she doesn't recognise F. While she raised concerns that the transactions may relate to an unlicensed casino, she's also said the transactions weren't processed as gambling payments and so an incorrect merchant category code (MCC) was used to bypass a gambling block on her account. I've considered these points carefully. However, I haven't seen sufficient evidence that the transactions were processed incorrectly or that the merchant was operating as a casino. In contrast, the information provided by F is consistent with a service being purchased and used.

Even if Mrs W's concern is that the transactions should have been blocked, that would depend on them being correctly identified and processed as tied to gambling. Based on what I've seen, I don't think there's enough evidence to support that here, or any persuasive evidence that an incorrect MCC was used.

More broadly, chargeback claims depend on meeting the requirements of the relevant scheme rules and being supported by sufficient evidence. Based on what I've seen, I don't think there is enough evidence to show these transactions fell within those requirements or that NatWest had a reasonable prospect of success if they had pursued the chargeback claim further.

With all of this in mind, I don't think NatWest did anything wrong in their handling of the chargeback claim and so I won't be asking them to do anything further.

My final decision

For the reasons explained above, I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs W to accept or reject my decision before 11 May 2026.

Viral Patel
Ombudsman