

## **The complaint**

Mr D is unhappy that NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY (NatWest) didn't provide appropriate support when his financial circumstances changed, despite being aware of his vulnerabilities.

I appreciate this will be disappointing for Mr D, but having considered all the evidence, I won't be upholding this complaint. This means I won't be asking NatWest to take any further action.

## **What happened**

Mr D and NatWest are familiar with what's happened with this complaint, so I will summarise it briefly here, which aligns with my informal responsibilities.

Mr D held a credit card account with NatWest, which had a promotional 0% interest rate due to expire in October 2025.

In October 2025 Mr D contacted NatWest to explain that his circumstances had changed. He said he was no longer in paid employment, that his mental health was affecting him, and that he was neurodivergent and a vulnerable customer. Mr D said that although he could continue making the minimum payments, he would struggle to do so once interest was applied given his financial situation.

NatWest discussed the support options available to Mr D. These included a short-term breathing space option, where interest would be suspended for 30 days, a forbearance arrangement, which would temporarily suspend payments, or other longer-term support options. However, Mr D said he didn't want his credit file to be adversely affected and felt these options hadn't met his needs. He said he was seeking a temporary solution such as freezing interest, for around six months, or getting a new promotional interest rate.

In October 2025 NatWest issued its final response and didn't uphold Mr D's complaint. It said it had considered Mr D's financial circumstances and had offered appropriate support based on his situation. While it acknowledged that Mr D wanted to continue making minimum payments without interest, and without any impact on his credit file, it said this wasn't a solution it was able to offer.

However, NatWest confirmed it had applied a three-month interest waiver to Mr D's account effective from 21 October 2025. It also said further support was available through its financial health and support team, should Mr D want to contact them, having previously declined.

## **Investigator's outcome**

An investigator at this service considered the complaint and didn't uphold it.

They were satisfied that NatWest had taken Mr D's circumstances, including his vulnerability, into account and had provided appropriate support, including measures that didn't affect his credit file.

Mr D disagreed and in summary said:

- He wasn't in arrears, had continued to make payments on time, and contacted NatWest proactively to avoid foreseeable financial harm.
- He was seeking a temporary and tailored reduction in interest, to allow him to continue meeting his repayment obligations, during a period of difficulty.
- NatWest effectively offered only two options, which was to continue paying interest at the standard rate, or to enter a formal arrangement with adverse credit reporting, which he felt didn't reflect the flexibility required under Consumer Duty.
- NatWest dealt with adverse credit reporting as an unavoidable outcome, rather than balancing this against the short-term temporary nature of the support he had requested and the potential long-term harm to his credit file.
- The three-month interest waiver didn't amount to a good customer outcome as it didn't provide a sustainable solution, or prevent future hardship, once the waiver ended.
- He made a £5,000 payment by borrowing from a friend to reduce his balance and to avoid high interest. He says this demonstrated his commitment to repayment, despite his reduced income and vulnerability, and also explained the pressure caused by the lack of proportionate support he received from NatWest.

As Mr D remained unhappy the case has been referred to me for a final decision.

### **How I consider complaints**

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

Whilst I've read and considered everything, if I don't mention any specific issue, it's not because I failed to consider it, but because I don't think I need to comment on it to provide what I think is a fair and reasonable outcome. This is not meant as a discourtesy but is due to how my role resolves disputes with minimum formality.

In considering what is fair and reasonable, I need to have regard to the relevant law and regulations, regulator's rules, guidance and standards, codes of practice (including the Consumer Duty and CONC), and where appropriate what I consider to have been good industry practice at the time.

### **What I've decided – and why**

#### *Mr D's circumstances*

I want to start by acknowledging Mr D's circumstances at the time. It's clear he contacted NatWest proactively when his employment situation changed and that he was trying to manage his finances responsibly. I've also seen he explained he was a vulnerable customer, with his mental health affected. In these circumstances, I would expect NatWest to take this into consideration, provide him with appropriate support and treat him fairly.

Having reviewed the available evidence, I'm satisfied NatWest did recognise Mr D's circumstances, including his vulnerability, and responded appropriately by discussing a

range of both short-term and longer-term support options to help manage his repayments. These included options such as a forbearance arrangement, breathing space, and the possibility of placing the account on hold.

I appreciate that Mr D felt the options offered didn't meet his needs, particularly as he wanted to avoid any adverse impact on his credit file. While I understand his concerns, I don't consider it unreasonable that some of these support options would affect his credit file.

A credit file is intended to provide accurate information of how an account is being managed. Where an account is no longer being maintained in accordance with its original terms, or is subject to a formal arrangement, I don't consider it unfair for this to be recorded. I'm satisfied NatWest explained this when providing the available options.

I also don't consider NatWest was unfair in explaining that the type of support Mr D was seeking - such as an interest-free or reduced-interest arrangement - would generally only be available as part of a formal arrangement. I've not seen anything in the account terms, or in the relevant rules or guidance, that would require NatWest to offer this type of arrangement outside of its established support options.

#### *Expectations under Consumer Duty*

I've gone on to consider the expectations under Consumer Duty and the relevant CONC guidance for customers in financial difficulty and those who may be vulnerable. These include requiring firms to act to deliver good outcomes, by providing appropriate support, and taking reasonable steps to avoid foreseeable harm. However, they don't remove a firm's ability to apply its commercial judgment or require it to offer every form of support a customer might prefer.

In this case, NatWest engaged with Mr D, considered his circumstances and provided a range of support options aimed at addressing his situation. It explained how these options worked, including any implications for his credit file, allowing him to make an informed choice. While Mr D considers the options were too limited, Consumer Duty doesn't require a firm to provide a specific outcome a customer prefers, but rather to ensure the support and options offered are appropriate and that the customer is dealt with fairly. I'm satisfied this is what happened here.

#### *Three-month interest waiver*

I've also considered the three-month interest waiver applied to the account. While I recognise Mr D's concern that this support was temporary and didn't provide a longer-term solution, I consider it was a reasonable form of short-term support in the circumstances - particularly given that he didn't want to enter into any arrangement that would affect his credit file.

I've also seen that Mr D has since made a significant payment towards the balance by borrowing from a friend. While I appreciate this demonstrates a positive intention to reduce his balance, I don't believe it changes whether NatWest dealt with Mr D fairly based on the information available to it at the time.

#### *Considering how NatWest communicated*

Finally, I've considered how NatWest communicated with Mr D, particularly considering his vulnerabilities.

From the available evidence, it offered access to its specialist support team and explained the available options and its implications. Taking everything into consideration, I'm satisfied NatWest took appropriate steps to support him.

Overall, I'm satisfied NatWest dealt with Mr D fairly and reasonably in the circumstances. It offered a range of support options, dealt with his circumstances with appropriate consideration, and I consider this fair in the circumstances. Whilst I understand this will be disappointing for Mr D, for the reasons I've explained, I'm not upholding this complaint

### **My final decision**

I don't uphold this case against NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr D to accept or reject my decision before 22 May 2026.

Farhana Rahman  
**Ombudsman**