

The complaint

Ms R complains about the way National Westminster Bank Public Limited Company (NatWest) has handled her loans and credit card accounts.

What happened

In August 2021, Ms R says she received diagnosis of a life limiting condition, and she was given a maximum life expectancy of five to ten years from that date. At the point, she says she was unable to work and got into difficulties with her finances.

In or around September 2021, Ms R says she let NatWest know about her situation. She says it closed her accounts and switched her account to a foundation account. She said she also spoke to a debt charity who advised her to get in touch with NatWest and apply for a medical write off, which she did.

Ms R complains that NatWest repeatedly exceeded the timeframes it gave her to reply. It declined her request for medical write off and went through two appeals with the debt collection agency who were managing her account. Ms R says that at no point during the process did anyone at NatWest speak to her. And it has been unresponsive, unhelpful and actively aggressive.

Ms R believes she meets the criteria to qualify for a medical write off and she has provided medical evidence to support this. She says the situation is causing her severe distress. She adds that she won't be able to work again to the capacity where she can repay the outstanding debt. And she's said that she is in poverty.

NatWest responded to Ms R's complaint; it expressed empathy for the situation she was in. However, it ultimately didn't agree to write off the debt she has with it. It explained that it had fully assessed Ms R's financial circumstances, but as Ms R is a homeowner, the debt must remain outstanding – which is something they must consider when assessing debt resolution options. It added that it wasn't actively pursuing Ms R for repayment of the debt. However, it explained that it could take action to get a charging order against Ms R's property.

An Investigator considered the evidence provided by both parties, but they didn't think that NatWest had done anything wrong.

Ms R didn't agree with the Investigator's view, and I have summarised her main points below:

- She reiterated how incredibly stressful the situation has been on her, and the severe impact this has had on her mental health.
- She didn't expect to not being able to pay back the debt when she took it out, however as a result of her medical conditions she is not able to work.
- The debt charities she has spoken to advised her to seek medical write off and they felt she met the criteria.
- Other people she knows, who are not in her position, and who owed far more to NatWest have had their debt written off.

- NatWest wouldn't discuss medical write off with her, or another way forward. NatWest were rude to her throughout and have failed to engage with her.

Because an agreement couldn't be reached, the complaint has been passed to me to decide on the matter.

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.

Firstly, I'd like to say that I am truly sorry to have read about the very difficult situation Ms R finds herself in. I have no doubt that she has been through, and continues to go through an incredibly challenging, stressful and worrying time. In this decision, I don't wish in anyway to downplay or disregard what Ms R has told us about her situation. However, being independent means, I must take a step back and consider all of the available evidence when coming to an outcome. And in doing so, I'm sorry to disappoint Ms R, but I don't uphold her complaint.

I'd also like to reassure Ms R that I have read and taken into account all of the information she has provided this Service. I say this as I'm aware that I have summarised her complaint in less detail than she has. If I've not reflected something that's been said, it isn't because I didn't see it, this just reflects my informal role in deciding on a fair and reasonable outcome.

Clearly Ms R has been and is experiencing issues with her health, which she has confirmed aren't going to be resolved. And as a result, I don't think it's in dispute here that Ms R won't now be able to pay back the debt she owes NatWest on a monthly basis. It appears NatWest accept this point.

Ultimately, it is up to NatWest to make the decision about whether to write off a debt. It is a commercial decision that it is entitled to make, and this service wouldn't generally interfere with its commercial decision, unless it appeared that Ms R had been treated unfairly as part of that process.

Here I can see that NatWest has considered Ms R's financial and health circumstances when it decided not to write off her debt. NatWest said that because Ms R is a homeowner, it felt that at some point, the asset could be used to pay back the debt. It suggested that it might do this by obtaining a charging order against the property – which is essentially a legal process whereby a charge is placed on the property, and when it is sold, NatWest will be able to recoup some or all of what is owed from the proceeds of the sale.

While I appreciate Ms R will find this disappointing, because there is a way NatWest could potentially be repaid, via the sale of the house – whenever that is - it would be unreasonable of me to require NatWest to write off such a high value debt, when there is a prospect of the debt being repaid at some point in the future.

I can see that NatWest has provided Ms R with assurances that it doesn't intend to ask her for repayment of the debt currently, it's also explained that she doesn't need to consolidate her debts nor does it intend to force the sale of her property. So, while I appreciate Ms R would be concerned about the debt she owes; I'm satisfied that NatWest has done what it can to treat Ms R fairly and reasonably in the circumstances.

I note Ms R's comments in that others she knows have had their debts written off. But I'm only required to consider the individual circumstances of this complaint. And having done so,

for the reasons I've explained, I can't fairly conclude that NatWest has done anything wrong in relation to not writing off the debt.

I have also looked at how NatWest has handled matters. I can see since Ms R has been unwell, there have been various contacts with NatWest. From what I can see, it has placed various holds on her account and showed her forbearance while she has been in difficulty. From when Ms R requested medical write off, I haven't seen anything to suggest that it didn't engage with her request. By this point, Ms R's account appears to have been managed by a debt collection agency, and so they're ultimately the firm that should be engaging with Ms R about NatWest's decision in relation to the write off. I can see that NatWest investigated Ms R's request relatively promptly and communicated this to the debt collection agency. I haven't seen anything to suggest that NatWest failed to engage with Ms R in the way I would have expected. And I can't see any evidence of it being rude or aggressive towards Ms R. I note that NatWest has explained to Ms R why it couldn't communicate with her representative, and this was because the relevant form wasn't completed with the signatures – I don't find this to be unreasonable.

I am aware that Ms R will be incredibly disappointed by my decision – I can understand why given the situation she is in. However, I can only order NatWest to put something right where I'm persuaded that it has done something wrong. And for all the reasons I've explained here, I can't fairly find that NatWest has acted unfairly or unreasonably.

My final decision

For the reasons set out above, I don't uphold Ms R's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms R to accept or reject my decision before 13 March 2026.

Sophie Wilkinson
Ombudsman