

The complaint

L is a company, and it has brought this complaint through its director, whom I'll refer to as Mr G.

L complains that National Westminster Bank Plc wrongly removed its access to online banking for several weeks between December 2024 and February 2025.

What happened

L is a letting agent. It holds a current account, a business reserve account and a client account with NatWest. Holding a client account enables it to keep rent collected on behalf of landlords separate from its own money.

Until December 2024 all three accounts were grouped together under a single business identification number (or BIN). That meant that they could be accessed online using the same online banking profile.

On or around 4 December 2024, however, the bank, in error, created a duplicate BIN and transferred the client account to it. The consequence was that the client account could not be accessed online.

NatWest has explained that, to remedy that error, it had to merge the account profiles. This took longer than it expected, and it was not until 4 February 2025 that all three accounts could again be accessed online.

Mr G complained on behalf of L. The bank treated his concerns as two separate complaints – one about the loss of online access to the client account and the other about the delay in resolving that issue. In respect of the first issue, NatWest paid L £350, but later offered to increase its settlement offer to £500 in total. In respect of the second issue, it offered to pay L a further £500.

One of our investigators considered what had happened but took the view that the bank's offer of £1,000 in total was reasonable in the circumstances. Mr G did not accept the investigator's assessment and asked that an ombudsman review the case.

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.

There is no real dispute about the background here. NatWest has acknowledged that it made an error and that it took longer than it should have done to ensure that full online access to all three accounts was restored. It dealt with those issues under two separate complaint references, but this service has treated the matter as a single complaint.

I think that some confusion arose when the bank set up two complaints, but it has since clarified that its proposal for resolution is to pay L £650 – in addition to the £350 it has already paid. If accepted, L will have received £1,000 in total. My focus in this decision is therefore on whether that is a fair and reasonable offer.

In explaining why it thought its offer was reasonable, the bank noted that L's client remained operational, even though online access was not available. It said that Mr G could have operated the account by telephone banking or in branch. I accept that was the case, although it does not appear that this was explained to Mr G at the time. But in any event, I do not believe that those options were a practical alternative to the online access which L should have had. I agree with Mr G that trying to do in person what he should have been able to do online would have been immensely time-consuming.

But I also note that the lack of online access does not appear to have had any direct financial impact on L's business. In saying that, I accept of course that Mr G had to spend time dealing with the issue rather than running the business.

I have taken all these matters into account in deciding what's fair and reasonable. Having done so, however, I agree with the investigator that NatWest's offer of £1,000 is a fair resolution. It is in line with awards made in comparable cases and with our published guidelines. Of that sum, L has already received £350, but I will make a formal award for the balance, so that L can enforce the award, should it need to do so.

My final decision

For these reasons, my final decision is that, to resolve L's complaint in full, National Westminster Bank Plc should pay L £650.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask L to accept or reject my decision before 24 February 2026.

Mike Ingram
Ombudsman