

complaint

Mrs Y has complained about the Advantage Gold packaged bank account that National Westminster Bank Plc (NatWest) sold to her in June 2008.

background

Mrs Y says that NatWest recommended the account to her and that she doesn't know why because it was of no use to her. She says that she wasn't told that there were other fee-free accounts that she could have had. She says that she should have been given the welcome pack explaining the features of the account before the upgrade and that if she had, she wouldn't have taken the account. She also complains that when she asked to downgrade her account she was persuaded to keep it. She did in the end downgrade the account in 2013.

Our adjudicator didn't think the complaint should be upheld. She thought that Mrs Y took the account, even though she knew there was a fee-free alternative available, because she was attracted to the benefits that came with it.

Mrs Y didn't agree so the complaint has come to me for a decision. This is the last stage of our process.

my findings

I have considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what is fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint. I have taken into account good industry practice, the relevant regulatory framework and the law that applied when the packaged bank account was sold. Having done so, I have decided not to uphold this complaint. I've set out my reasons below.

Mrs Y says that she wasn't told she could have had a fee-free account when she opened the Advantage Gold account. But Mrs Y has also said that she has previously held bank accounts with other banks where no fee was payable. So I think that she would have known she could have had a fee-free account with NatWest too if she had wanted one. And, in any event, she knew she could have taken one at another bank. But she chose not to.

Mrs Y also says that NatWest advised her to have this account whereas NatWest say they only gave information about packaged bank accounts and let consumers decide for themselves about whether they wanted a packaged account. They say this is what would have happened in Mrs Y's case. I accept that NatWest probably presented the Advantage Gold in a positive light but Mrs Y hasn't persuaded me that they went so far as to advise her it was suitable for her.

Mrs Y says that she didn't need or use the benefits that came with the Advantage Gold but she registered her mobile telephone for the insurance that came with the account and she says she cancelled the standalone mobile phone insurance she already had. So it's clear that she did use this benefit and find it attractive.

Mrs Y also says she thought she registered for the travel insurance. In fact, the travel insurance came automatically with the account and didn't require registration. But, bearing in mind that Mrs Y travelled regularly both inside and outside Europe and that it was worldwide insurance that came with the account, I think this is likely to have been one of the things that attracted her to the Advantage Gold.

As to what Mrs Y has said about being persuaded to keep the account, I think that it's likely the NatWest representative did no more than remind Mrs Y of the benefits of the account with the result that she decided she still wanted it at that point.

I appreciate that there may have been some benefits of the account that Mrs Y didn't want or use. But packaged bank accounts are rarely tailored to the individual so it's unlikely that every consumer will find every benefit useful. It was for Mrs Y to decide whether the benefits, as a whole package, were attractive to her. Consumers might have been attracted to a packaged bank account even if they didn't intend to use every benefit.

I accept that NatWest mightn't have given Mrs Y all the information about the account she needed to make an informed choice. But I've not seen any persuasive evidence that anything NatWest should have told Mrs Y would have made her decide not to take the account.

So I don't think she's lost out because of any problems there might have been with the sale and I don't uphold this complaint.

my final decision

For the reasons set out above, I don't uphold this complaint and I make no award against National Westminster Bank Plc.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I am required to ask Mrs Y to accept or reject my decision before 1 May 2015.

E J Mc Allister
ombudsman