

complaint

Miss S complained that Bank of Ireland (UK) Plc, trading as Post Office Money, provided poor service when she wanted to know the expiry date of her promotional credit card rate.

background

Miss S had a Post Office credit card which had a promotional rate of 0% for purchases. In early June 2016, she rang the Post Office to find out exactly when this expired. The Post Office couldn't answer. Instead, it sent a letter in late July, which didn't answer her question, and said it didn't have a record of any promotional rate on Miss S's account.

Miss S rang the Post Office about the letter in mid-August. She said she was already getting the 0% offer and all she'd wanted to know was when it expired. She thought from memory that it was some time in October but wanted to check if she'd got that right or not. This time the advisor understood the question, but said there was definitely a 0% rate but that it had been applied a different way. So the advisor said she'd ring back to tell Miss S the expiry date. Miss S said the Post Office never did so.

Miss S's September 2016 statement had a note on it to say "*Your promotional rate for purchases will expire 14/11/16.*"

At the end of October, the Post Office replied to Miss S and apologised for the poor service. It confirmed that she was getting the promotional rate and this would expire on 14 November. The letter offered Miss S £15 for her call costs and £35 to recognise the trouble and upset she'd had.

Miss S wasn't satisfied and complained to this service. She said the bank hadn't given her enough notice to be able to pay off the balance, and she wanted more compensation.

The adjudicator agreed the Post Office's customer service wasn't of the level we'd expect. But she considered that the £50 offered by the Post Office was fair. She explained that:

- Miss S said she'd paid for calls costing £85. The adjudicator noted that Miss S had rung on 3 June to ask the rate, and on 15 August because of the inaccurate Post Office reply. The adjudicator thought £15 was sufficient for the cost of these.
- Miss S had asked for compensation for having to look for other deals at short notice. But under the terms and conditions of the account, the Post Office was required to give 30 days' notice of changes, including ending promotional offers. It had done this.
- Miss S said she wanted more compensation because she'd been worried about not being able to clear the balance and the effect this would have on her credit file. The adjudicator said there was no evidence Miss S had been told she'd have to clear the balance on the expiry of the offer – she'd just be charged interest.
- The adjudicator also didn't agree that Miss S should have compensation for worrying about not being granted a mortgage and her employment being at risk.

Miss S wasn't satisfied. She sent a long explanation of why she thought the Post Office had failed in its legal obligations. She said it had broken Data Protection laws, the Consumer Credit Act and the principles of the Financial Conduct Authority.

my findings

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint. This includes listening to the recording of Miss S's August phone call.

I agree with Miss S that she should have received better service from the Post Office when she rang with a very simple question – whether her promotional offer expired in October 2016 as she thought, or at another date. I consider the June advisor should have been able to tell her straightaway, and the bank's follow-up letter in July missed Miss S's point completely.

I also find that the August advisor tried to help, but it shouldn't have taken until the end of October for the Post Office to reply fully. However, Miss S's statement dated 14 September does clearly say that the date the offer would end would be 14 November. This was what Miss S wanted to know, and in fact it was better than she'd thought, as she told the August advisor she believed it was some time in October.

So I find that the customer service the Post Office provided was poor, in that it failed to answer a simple question, and delayed providing a proper reply. But I don't consider that this meant the Post Office broke all the laws which Miss S's latest email says it did.

I find that £50 was a proportionate amount of compensation for the Post Office's poor service. This included compensating Miss S £15 for phone costs, which I think was more than fair for one call on 15 August to pursue the Post Office's inaccurate letter. I am also not persuaded by Miss S's recent emails in which she says the Post Office caused her to suffer severe considerable stress by having to look for alternative deals, and worrying about not being able to get a mortgage or losing her job. I am not persuaded that this level of stress would reasonably flow from the Post Office's failure to answer Miss S's question about the expiry date of her deal. This is particularly so when Miss S is recorded on the August call as believing the expiry date was October. So she'd have been expecting to sort out her options by then, and the 14 September statement told her the date was mid-November, later than she believed.

So I find that the Post Office gave Miss S poor service when it failed to deal with her straightforward question, and took too long to give her a proper reply. But it gave her two months' notice of the change rather than the one month it was required to do, and I find that £50 compensation which it offered was fair and reasonable.

I leave it to Miss S to decide whether or not to accept the Post Office's offer.

my final decision

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss S to accept or reject my decision before 30 January 2017.

Belinda Knight
ombudsman