

The complaint

Mr C is unhappy that National Savings and Investments ("NS&I") haven't been able to resolve issues he's experienced while trying to login to his NS&I online account.

What happened

Mr C couldn't login to his NS&I premium bond account and felt the issue had arisen following a change NS&I had made to its login process. Mr C contacted NS&I about the issue, but he remained unable to login to his online account. Mr C wasn't happy about this, or with the long hold times he's experienced when trying to contact NSI, and so he raised a complaint.

NS&I apologised to Mr C and explained the alternative ways he could access his account. NS&I also paid £75 to Mr C as compensation for any trouble and upset he'd incurred. Mr C wasn't satisfied with NS&I's response, so he referred his complaint to this service.

One of our investigators looked at this complaint. They agreed that Mr C had been inconvenienced by not being able to login to his NS&I account, but they noted that NS&I were trying to resolve the issue and felt the £75 that NS&I had paid to Mr C already represented fair compensation for the trouble and inconvenience Mr C had. Mr C remained dissatisfied, so the matter was escalated to an ombudsman for a final decision.

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.

Having done so, I'd like to begin by confirming that this service isn't a regulatory body or a Court of Law and doesn't operate as such. This means that it isn't within my remit here to declare that NS&I have or haven't acted in a non-regulatory or unlawful way.

Instead, this service is an informal, impartial dispute resolution service. And while we do take relevant law and regulation into account when arriving at our decisions, our remit is focussed on determining whether we feel a fair or unfair outcome has occurred – from an impartial perspective, after taking all the circumstances and factors of a complaint into consideration.

I also note that Mr C has provided several detailed submissions to this service regarding his complaint. I'd like to thank Mr C for these submissions, and I hope he doesn't consider it a discourtesy that I won't be responding in similar detail here. Instead, I've focussed on what I consider to be the key aspects of this complaint, in line with this service's role as an informal dispute resolution service.

This means that if Mr C notes that I haven't addressed a specific point he's raised, it shouldn't be taken from this that I haven't considered that point – I can confirm that I've read and considered all the submissions provided by both Mr C and NS&I. Rather, it should be taken that I have considered that point but that I don't feel it necessary to address it directly in this letter to arrive at what I consider to be a fair resolution to this complaint.

I can appreciate Mr C's frustration at not being able to login to his premium bond account online. But having reviewed the information submitted by both Mr C and NS&I, I'm satisfied that NS&I are trying to resolve the issue but unfortunately haven't yet been able to do so.

NS&I's lack of success in this regard leads me to consider the possibility that the source of the issue might lie outside NS&I's area of control. And I note that Mr C has been unwilling to follow some requests from NS&I, such as attempting to login via a different web browser, which may have mitigated against the problems Mr C has been experiencing.

Additionally, while Mr C has been inconvenienced by not being able to login online, NS&I have explained how he can manage his account via other channels. These include via phone or via online or postal form for withdrawals, and by phone, post, or faster payment for deposits. And given these alternatives that remain available to Mr C, I don't feel the level of inconvenience he's experienced can reasonably be considered as being significant.

I'm aware that Mr C has contacted NS&I by telephone on several occasions and is unhappy with the long hold times he's experienced as well as NS&I's use of virtual assistants for incoming calls. But the use of a virtual assistant system to direct inbound calls is a commercial decision that NS&I are entitled to make. And it isn't in NS&I's control as to how many people are attempting to contact it at any one time, which can lead to long hold times. And while I accept that this is frustrating for Mr C, I don't feel that this is unfair.

Finally, NS&I have explained that Mr C holds £25 of premium bonds, which is the minimum amount that can be held. And I feel that this is a relevant factor when considering the impact of these events on Mr C, because I feel being unable to login and monitor an account that holds £25 of premium bonds is less impactful than being unable to login and monitor an account which holds a larger amount of premium bonds, which can be held up to a maximum amount of £50,000.

All of which means that I feel the response that NS&I have issued to Mr C's complaint, including payment of £75 compensation, already represents a fair outcome here. And it follows that I won't be upholding this complaint or instructing NS&I to take any further action.

My position here is in consideration that NS&I are working to try to resolve the issue Mr C has experienced, that alternative means to access his account are available to Mr C, and that the impact of these events on Mr C doesn't appear to be significant such that I feel the £75 compensation already paid to Mr C by NS&I is a fair amount.

I realise this won't be the outcome Mr C was wanting here, but I trust he'll understand, given what I've explained, why I've made the final decision that I have.

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 Mr C to accept or reject my decision before 18 August 2023.

Paul Cooper
Ombudsman