

The complaint

Mr R complains that he has no online access to a Buy To Let (“BTL”) mortgage he holds with Barclays Bank UK PLC. Mr R said this was impeding his ability to make overpayments within his allowance on to the mortgage, so he wanted Barclays to fix this.

What happened

Mr R said he had no access to his BTL mortgage through Barclays’ app or online banking. He wanted to make some lump sum payments, and was unhappy about doing so when he couldn’t see online that the money had arrived safely. Mr R said he could have made lump sum payments to the mortgage over the last few years, which would have reduced the monthly interest payments he was making, but he wasn’t happy to do that without being able to see the status of the mortgage online.

Mr R said that even if he rang, and put up with what he said were entirely unreasonable call waiting times, Barclays still couldn’t confirm that money paid to his mortgage had arrived. Mr R said he has a very busy job, and he just couldn’t wait the excessive amount of time it would take to speak to Barclays.

Barclays said the particular type of BTL mortgage Mr R has, unfortunately isn’t visible online. It said if Mr R wanted information on this mortgage, then he would have to call. Barclays said it was sorry that it had long wait times for calls, but it said that at the moment, this was due to factors beyond its control.

Barclays said that it could confirm the payments Mr R had made recently had been received, and credited to his mortgage. It said it does usually take a few working days for payments to be posted to this BTL mortgage.

Barclays said Mr R’s mortgage had an early repayment charge until early February 2024.

Barclays did accept that when Mr R contacted it, and when he tried to raise his complaint, he hadn’t received the level of service that it would like to give its customers. It offered £150 to say sorry for its lapses in service.

Our investigator didn’t think this complaint should be upheld. He looked at what had gone wrong here, and noted that Mr R had tried repeatedly to raise a complaint about why his mortgage wasn’t showing on the Barclays app. He also said that Barclays at one point told Mr R that it couldn’t confirm it had received the overpayments he had made. Mr R then contacted Barclays again, to get confirmation his complaint had been raised and that his payments had been received. Barclays hadn’t raised the complaint, and told him to go into a branch to discuss his mortgage account. Mr R’s complaint was eventually logged on 9 November.

Our investigator said Mr R’s complaint should have been logged by Barclays when it was first raised, on 4 November. He noted that Barclays had rightly apologised for the service Mr R received, and offered £150 for a disconnected call, his complaint not initially being logged,

and the wait times Mr R encountered. But on the core issue Mr R wanted Barclays to fix, making his account visible online, Barclays said it couldn't do that. It said Mr R could call for information on his mortgage, although it appreciated there were long wait times. Barclays didn't agree that its system had prevented Mr R from making overpayments, so that he'd ended up paying more interest on his mortgage.

Our investigator said Barclays had explained, on a call with Mr R, why his particular mortgage wasn't visible on Barclays' app or via online banking. Our investigator said he could understand why Mr R would be cautious about making a payment to his mortgage if he couldn't view it online and check it was received. But Barclays had confirmed overpayments were still possible, and Mr R can then either call to confirm, or wait for Barclays to issue its confirmation letter in a couple of working days. Barclays had also suggested Mr R could call first thing in the morning, when it's quieter, or it would call Mr R back. Our investigator said the second of these, the call back, might not suit Mr R, but calling earlier might be possible.

Ultimately, our investigator said that our service cannot tell Barclays to change or update its systems so Mr R's mortgage is visible online. From the evidence he'd seen, there wasn't anything further Barclays could do. And the problems hadn't in fact prevented Mr R from making overpayments. Our investigator said Mr R had made three overpayments on 4 November, and had received Barclay's letters confirming payment. Barclays had also given options for how Mr R could check payments were received before these letters are sent. So, whilst our investigator noted that Mr R told us his job is busy, our investigator still thought Barclays had helped as best it could to resolve things for him.

Mr R didn't agree. He said he'd been forced to make payments into a black hole, because he couldn't see his mortgage online. He said he had no option but to make payments or he would have lost his right to make 10% overpayments annually. He said he'd been kept waiting for hours just to see if money had been received. Mr R said he'd been bombarded with advices of payments and new mortgage monthly repayments from Barclays, but that only happened since our service started investigating his complaint.

Mr R still didn't think this was fair. Other Barclays customers can see their mortgage accounts via online banking, but he couldn't. And he thought it was insulting for us to ask him to call the bank early in the morning.

But our investigator didn't change his mind. He said Barclays was sending Mr R payment confirmation and statements. He said it was Mr R's choice to make overpayments, he didn't have to, and Barclays wouldn't penalise him if he didn't. Our investigator said the payment notifications didn't just start when Mr R complained, they were sent to him before our involvement in the complaint. And our investigator said Barclays was treating Mr R the same as other customers who have the same sort of BTL mortgage as him.

Mr R said again that call wait times were unacceptable. He stressed how unhelpful it was to be sending payments of thousands of pounds, and having to wait days to know they had been safely received. He repeated that the advices of payment receipt only started after our involvement in the case, and that other Barclays BTL customers can see their mortgages online

Our investigator asked Barclays for the overpayment acknowledgement letters it had sent to Mr R, and forwarded them. Mr R still didn't agree.

Because no agreement was reached, this case came to me 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.

I've reached the same overall conclusion on this complaint as our investigator.

Before looking at the issues in this complaint, I'd like to acknowledge that there has been some discussion between Mr R and our investigator about whether Mr R received payment acknowledgment letters before his complaint came to us. It appears as if our investigator thought Mr R could be suggesting that Barclays had only decided to write to acknowledge his payments, when our service became involved in the complaint.

I can hear, on the call where Mr R was finally able to raise his complaint with Barclays, that he said he'd just received three letters confirming receipt of the three overpayments he'd recently made. So I think our investigator was right to say that Barclays did write to Mr R to confirm these payments had been safely received. It doesn't look to me as if these letters were a result of our service's involvement in the case.

Turning to the core issues in this complaint, I understand Mr R, like many bank customers, has become accustomed to dealing with banking issues online, and would like to have the added security of being able to see this mortgage online too. I can understand that he would have concerns about making overpayments, and perhaps particularly about the first overpayment, when he can't see the mortgage account online, and be confident payments were safely received.

But Barclays has said that, not long after Mr R took out this mortgage, it changed its online systems. And it simply wasn't able to integrate this mortgage product into its new online system. So this particular BTL mortgage can't be viewed online, and it also isn't available to be viewed by many of Barclays' call agents.

Although I understand why Mr R wants the online banking functionality, and I accept this would be more convenient and more reassuring for him, I've not been able to see that Barclays has promised to make this available to him, or that it's otherwise required to do so. I understand why Mr R says it's poor customer service not to have this visible online, but I don't think Barclays has been unfair or unreasonable, by not making this mortgage visible online.

I also don't accept that Mr R has been prevented from making overpayments on this mortgage to date, so that Barclays needs to pay compensation for interest he wouldn't have been charged. I note that Mr R has successfully made overpayments to his mortgage recently, without online access to his account. And Barclays has acknowledged these. I hope that, even if the overpayment arrangements remain less than ideal, Mr R will find it reassuring that the system does appear to be working, and will be more comfortable continuing to make such payments in future.

Mr R says it's not acceptable to ask him to call, and experience very long waiting times, just to confirm payments have been safely received. But Barclays says that even if Mr R does call on the same day a payment has made, it won't be able to confirm that the payment has been received. It has explained that it takes a few working days for payments to be posted to, and visible on, this particular BTL mortgage product. I understand Mr R may consider that this is simply more inconvenience, but in my view, it's not unusual for overpayments to mortgages not to be credited instantaneously. So I don't think that this is unfair or

unreasonable. And I note that Barclays is sending Mr R payment confirmations, which I consider it is issuing reasonably promptly.

I know that Mr R will be disappointed, but I don't think Barclays has to do more to make his mortgage account visible to him online. Barclays says that Mr R's ERC ceases to be payable early next year, so Mr R may then wish to change his mortgage product to something which would have better online access.

Barclays has also apologised for the poor service it has provided to Mr R. I can see that it took a considerable amount of time and effort on Mr R's part to raise a complaint with Barclays. He told us he continued to experience very long wait times, and, having listened to the relevant call, I understand why he's formed the impression that a Barclays agent hung up on him, while he was trying to make a complaint.

I do think the problems Barclays has acknowledged represent poor service. So I'm glad to see that Barclays has offered a payment of £150 to apologise. I think that provides a fair and reasonable outcome to this part of Mr R's complaint. It doesn't look as if this payment has yet been made, as Mr R didn't want to accept this compensation payment. So I'll ask Barclays to pay that now, if it hasn't already done so.

I know Mr R will be disappointed, but I don't otherwise think this complaint should be upheld.

My final decision

My final decision is that Barclays Bank UK PLC must now pay Mr R the sum of £150 that it previously offered for this complaint, unless it has already done so.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr R to accept or reject my decision before 7 August 2023.

Esther Absalom-Gough
Ombudsman