

The complaint

Mrs W complains that Nationwide Building Society no longer sends out an annual breakdown of how interest is calculated and paid on her savings account.

Mrs W is also unhappy that Nationwide promised to send an interest calculation breakdown during a phone call, but then didn't do this.

To resolve things, Mrs W would like for Nationwide to provide an interest calculation breakdown, and compensation for having been promised information that then wasn't delivered.

Mrs W is represented by her husband Mr W in this matter.

What happened

I issued my provisional findings to both parties setting out why I thought Mrs W's complaint should be upheld, and invited both parties to provide any further submissions in reply to my provisional decision.

The background to this complaint was set out in my provisional decision together with my provisional findings, which are included below and now form part of this final decision.

Background

On 4 January 2023 Mr W called Nationwide to request an interest calculation breakdown for Mrs W's savings account. During the call the Nationwide agent said a breakdown would be sent out within 10 working days. (I've listened to the call recording in question and will refer to this in more detail later on.)

On 10 January 2023 Nationwide sent Mrs W a letter which set out the interest rates that had been applied to her account during 2022. A breakdown of how the interest had been calculated for Mrs W's account was not provided.

Mr W contacted Nationwide on 13 January 2023 to complain that the wrong information had been provided.

Nationwide did not uphold Mrs W's complaint. They issued their final response in reply to the complaint on 2 February 2023. The letter explained Nationwide try not to complete these calculation breakdowns unless there is unusual activity on the account. Nationwide said this was because they complete these breakdowns manually and they are time-consuming – so they instead ask members to let them know if the interest on an account looks incorrect and they'll then review each individual case.

Mrs W brought the complaint to our service, and our Investigator reviewed the matter. The Investigator concluded Mrs W's complaint should not be upheld.

In summary, the Investigator said there was no obligation for Nationwide to provide such a

breakdown, and to not do so was a business decision they were entitled to make. The Investigator also noted that while Nationwide had given Mr W incorrect information in the call on 4 January 2023, it was corrected soon after and there had been minimal impact to Mrs W, so they didn't think any award was due. The Investigator also noted that Mr W had said they did not believe anything to be wrong about the interest applied to the account.

Mr W disagreed with the Investigator's findings.

In summary, Mr W said it was not acceptable for Nationwide to have promised something and then not deliver on that promise. Mr W also said Nationwide had not told them that this was a service they were no longer providing for their members, and he did not learn of this until he raised the complaint for Mrs W.

Mr W also raised his concerns about how Nationwide then dealt with the complaint he raised, as he was assured the complaint would be reviewed, but this didn't happen. Our Investigator explained to Mr W that concerns with how a business handles their complaints was not within our powers to look at.

As our Investigator could not reach a resolution, the complaint has come to me to decide.

My provisional findings

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've reached a different outcome to our Investigator, and I'll explain why.

I agree with our Investigator in so far as I am unaware of any requirement for Nationwide to provide the interest calculation breakdown that Mrs W is looking for. Offering this service would be a commercial decision and not something I can interfere with. I've also not seen anything in the product literature to support that this was something Nationwide offered as part of the terms and conditions of the account. So I'm unable to say Nationwide have done anything wrong in this regard.

However, having listened to the call recording between Mr W and Nationwide which took place on 4 January 2023 I think the Nationwide agent did raise Mr and Mrs W's expectations by saying an interest calculation breakdown would be made available to Mrs W, but this did not then happen and different information about the account was sent to Mrs W instead.

It is clear on the call that when Mr W initially requested the interest calculation breakdown the Nationwide agent immediately explained that this was not something Nationwide offered their members, and that it would be necessary for Mrs W to show her own workings out first. Mr W responded to say they could not carry out a calculation as they did not know the interest rates, and told the Nationwide agent the interest calculation breakdown was something Mrs W had received in the past.

The agent reviewed Mrs W's account and noted that Nationwide had produced this document for Mrs W before, so they agreed to request this again for Mrs W. Mr W confirmed that this would be a computation and not an interest certificate, to which the agent confirmed that it would be the breakdown.

Nationwide's letter of 10 January 2023 listed the different interest rates that had been applied to Mrs W's account together with the dates each rate became effective. The letter also confirmed that Mrs W's interest was being calculated correctly; that a computerised method was used to calculate the interest; and that a leaflet was enclosed - which Nationwide said would explain more about the calculation method. Lastly, the letter said

Mrs W could get in touch with details of her own calculations if she thought Nationwide had made a mistake.

In view of the exchange between Mr W and the Nationwide agent on the call, I think Mr W was given conflicting information, and I think this gave rise to an expectation on Mr and Mrs W's part that they would receive the information they were looking for. I think it's fair to say this added to Mr and Mrs W's inconvenience in trying to sort this out. For this reason, I think Nationwide should recognise this inconvenience by paying £50 to Mrs W.

However, I don't think Mrs W has been impacted financially by not having had access to the interest calculation breakdown – Mr W himself told our service that they did not suspect anything to be wrong with the interest that had been applied. Mr W said they simply wanted the calculation to check for themselves that nothing was wrong.

I understand Mr and Mrs W's frustration with this matter – it is a service they've previously received from Nationwide and, as Mr W has said, there was nothing to suggest that it was no longer available. Mr W says he wasn't told this until he raised the complaint – although I would refer back to the call with the Nationwide agent on 4 January 2023 in which they told Mr W at the very start of the call that this wasn't a service Nationwide were offering.

Nationwide have explained they no longer provide this service to members as it is a costly exercise and they've noted that due to several changes in the interest rates during 2022 that many more members have asked for this type of calculation. As Nationwide says the calculation is carried out manually, they do not have the resources to carry on meeting this demand, so they are prioritising those members who believe their calculations are wrong.

Mr W has queried whether the calculation is in fact carried out manually and whether it is really that complicated to process. While I acknowledge Mr W's points, I have no reason to doubt that the calculation is carried out manually, and it is not for this service to say what systems and processes a business has in place so there is nothing more I can say in relation to this point.

I am unable to interfere with a business's commercial decision making, so I don't think it would be reasonable for me to now tell Nationwide to carry out the interest calculation breakdown for Mrs W's account. It may help Mr and Mrs W to understand that although Mr W may have been given incorrect information it does not automatically follow that things should be put right as if the misrepresentation had been true. If correct information had been given from the outset, Nationwide would not have provided the interest calculation breakdown. However, if Mr and Mrs W now believe there is something wrong with how interest has been applied to Mrs W's account, they can approach Nationwide separately about this.

I'm aware Mr W raised concerns about his experience with the complaint handling department as he says he was again promised that something would happen and it did not. Mr W says if he had not followed up with Nationwide, then he believes no one would have updated him about the complaint.

I understand Mr W's frustrations with how Nationwide initially handled the complaint, but as our Investigator explained, it's not within the remit of this service to be able to look at how businesses handle complaints. It may also help Mr and Mrs W to understand that this service's role is to resolve individual complaints on the basis of what is fair and reasonable in all the circumstances of the case, so this service cannot fine or punish a business – that is something for the regulator to consider.

Responses to my provisional decision

Nationwide replied to my provisional decision to accept the findings and agreed to pay Mrs W £50 to settle the matter.

Neither Mrs W nor Mr W replied to my provisional 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.

As Nationwide accepted my provisional decision and neither Mrs W nor Mr W offered any further evidence or submissions for me to consider, I see no reason to alter my conclusions as set out in my provisional findings above.

For the reasons above I think Nationwide raised Mrs W and Mr W's expectations by suggesting the information they were seeking would be made available to them, but it was then not sent to them. And I think £50 is fair in the circumstances to recognise the inconvenience caused by this. However, as I've explained above, I don't think it was unreasonable for Nationwide to say that a breakdown of the interest calculation would not be possible unless Mrs W believed it to be wrong.

Putting things right

Nationwide Building Society should pay Mrs W £50.

My final decision

My final decision is that Mrs W's complaint is upheld and Nationwide Building Society should put things right as I've described above. Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs W to accept or reject my decision before 3 August 2023.

Kristina Mathews
Ombudsman