

## **The complaint**

Ms B says Barclays Bank UK PLC has unfairly closed her accounts.

## **What happened**

Ms B held accounts with Barclays which had been inactive for some time. At the end of November 2022 Barclays informed Ms B that it would be closing three accounts she held, and to get in touch if Ms B wanted the accounts to remain open.

Barclays didn't hear from Ms B so all three accounts were closed. Ms B contacted Barclays about its decision to close the accounts and was informed she would need to use its reclaim process to access the funds within the accounts. Ms B complained to Barclays, explaining she never received the closure notifications. Ms B explained she has been a long-standing customer, and her accounts should be reopened.

Barclays explained it had closed Ms B's accounts in line with the account terms and conditions and that the reclaim process would need to be followed by Ms B, and this included the ID and verification requirements. Unhappy with Barclays' handling of her concerns, Ms B referred her complaint to our service.

Ms B reiterated her concerns to the Investigator and explained that the reclaim process is unfair as it takes up to three months for the funds to be released and she would need to make a trip to the UK. Ms B feels Barclays should factor in her circumstances and consider transferring the funds to another account or reopening the accounts. An Investigator reviewed the complaint and found that Barclays had acted reasonably in the circumstances, and the reclaim requirements were fair.

Ms B remained unhappy, so the complaint has been passed 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.

I realise the closure of Ms B's accounts will be inconvenient for Ms B, especially as she says she isn't a full time UK resident. I also appreciate the requirements Barclays has set out for Ms B to reclaim the funds from her accounts requires time and additional effort on Ms B's part. However, based on all the available evidence I'm satisfied Barclays hasn't acted unfairly. I'll explain why.

### *Account closure*

When considering the closure of an account the starting point is the terms and conditions of the account. In Ms B's case the terms of her accounts explain:

*If you haven't used your account for a long time, we may close it. We'll give you two months'*

*written notice if we plan to do this and explain to you what you can do to keep it open. If there's any money in the account, we'll tell you how to reclaim it.*

Barclays has provided copies of the letters it issued to Ms B. These letters clearly set out the accounts would close due to inactivity and each one provided Ms B with the necessary two-month notice period. The letters also set out clearly the steps Ms B can take if she wished for the accounts to remain open.

Ms B says she didn't receive these letters, and this is unfortunate. However, as Ms B had asked NatWest to correspond with her online, these letters were not posted to Ms B. It therefore would've been for Ms B to review these letters online. I understand Ms B's frustrations around this, but I am satisfied Barclays acted in line with the account terms and conditions and took reasonable steps to inform Ms B of the impending closures.

I understand Ms B feels her long-standing relationship with Barclays hasn't been taken into consideration, and she is disappointed with Barclays' decision to strictly adhere to its internal policy. Ms B feels it should show more understanding of her situation and reopen the accounts. However, I must highlight Barclays isn't under any obligation to depart from its standard approach to inactive accounts due to a customer being long standing. And I wouldn't expect it to reopen Ms B's accounts given it provided her with the necessary notice. I am satisfied in its dealings with Ms B it has been clear and provided the necessary information. So, I don't think it has treated her unfairly in closing the accounts.

#### *Reclaim process*

It's not in dispute that Ms B's accounts were not used for a significant period of time. However, they still contained funds which Ms B now wishes to access. Ms B says Barclays should transfer the funds to another account without her having to go through the reclaim process. I understand Ms B's frustration with the steps she has to go through to reclaim the funds, but I think Barclays' requirements are reasonable. It is also important to highlight the requirements are necessary for Barclays to adhere to its legal and regulatory obligations.

Barclays has provided its internal guidance for inactive accounts. This specifies that if there is no customer contact within the notice period the accounts will be closed and a clear record kept of the customer's funds, which they are still entitled to claim. In Ms B's case, she can reclaim the funds provided the necessary requirements are met. Barclays has explained Ms B needs to meet the ID and verification requirements, which involves Ms B providing certified ID and proof of address documents. These are standard requirements for a reclaim process, and I can't see that the information Barclays has asked for goes beyond what I would expect a bank to require for funds to be released.

I understand Ms B is not a full time UK resident and attending branch and providing some of the information required presents more challenges. However, I can see Barclays has tried to accommodate this by arranging for a branch meeting for Ms B when she was in the UK to assist with the reclaim process. Barclays' records indicate Ms B did attend branch but did not go through the reclaim process. It has explained Ms B can reclaim funds via its portal or attending a branch when she is next in the UK.

Ms B has also referred to the time it will take for the funds to be released to her, as Barclays has indicated this can take up to 12 weeks. I understand Ms B may consider this an unreasonable amount of time, but this is in keeping with general industry timeframes given the checks required.

Overall, I am satisfied Barclays has closed Ms B's accounts down fairly and it has taken reasonable steps to assist Ms B with reclaiming her funds. If Ms B still wishes to access her

funds, I would encourage her to discuss any issues she is having with the proof of address aspect of the requirements directly with Barclays so she can consider the next steps.

I know this will not be the outcome Ms B was hoping for and she will be disappointed with the decision I've reached. But I hope my decision provides some clarity around why I won't be asking Barclays to take any action.

### **My final decision**

My final decision is that I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms B to accept or reject my decision before 3 January 2024.

Chandni Green  
**Ombudsman**