

The complaint

Mr S complains about the way his address is recorded by Equifax Limited trading as Equifax.

What happened

The background to this complaint and my initial conclusions were set out in my provisional decision. I said:

Mr S lives in a block of flats above a commercial building. Mr S has explained that due to the way his address is recorded by Equifax he's had difficulties securing credit. In May 2023, Mr S asked Equifax to update his address to show the correct flat number.

Equifax looked at Mr S' request but said that the flat number he was seeking to use wasn't recorded with The Royal Mail as a registered address. As Equifax obtains address information from The Royal Mail database, it meant Mr S' flat number wasn't being shown on his credit file. Equifax later advised that Mr S is registered on the electoral roll at the building number but his local authority wasn't reporting a flat number for him which also impacted how his information was recorded on his credit file.

Mr S provided evidence that showed he's set up accounts with lenders and businesses that include his flat number. But Equifax explained that it can't use an address that isn't registered with The Royal Mail for a consumer's residence. On 29 May 2023 Equifax gave Mr S details about how to contact The Royal Mail's address maintenance team to register his flat.

Mr S' credit file shows that some of his accounts were changed by Equifax's system to show he lives at Flat 1 which isn't correct.

Mr S complained to Equifax and went on to refer his complaint to this service. An investigator looked at Mr S' complaint and upheld it in part. The investigator said Equifax had amended Mr S' address which meant it wasn't being accurately recorded on his credit file. The investigator asked Equifax to pay Mr S £250 but it didn't agree. As a result, Mr S' complaint has been passed to me to make a decision.

What I've provisionally 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 can understand why Mr S is frustrated at what may feel like reluctance on Equifax's part to amend his address. And I can see that Mr S has been able to successfully register his address with businesses that report information on his credit file. So it may feel like this is a simple fix for Equifax. However, Equifax has pointed out it works differently and can't manually input an address as a lender or other business may be able to do. Equifax explains that it sources address formats for credit file purposes from The Royal Mail's database. As a result, if an address isn't registered with The Royal Mail, it means it can't be used on

Equifax's credit file. In addition, Equifax has pointed out that different businesses and organisations are using varying formats for Mr S' address.

I've checked Mr S' address with The Royal Mail and can confirm his flat is not recorded. When using Mr S' postcode and street details, I found an address that covered multiple street numbers, including the one Mr S uses. But there was no flat number that corresponds with Mr S' address.

Another organisation that provides independent address records is the local authority. But Mr S' local authority doesn't report him as living at the flat number he's given either, just the street number.

I am very sympathetic to Mr S' situation as none of the issues he's experienced have been caused by him. But to me, it appears the main cause of the difficulties Mr S is experiencing relate to the fact his flat isn't registered with The Royal Mail so isn't recorded on its database. So the starting point to resolve the address formatting issues is for the address to be updated with The Royal Mail.

Equifax has provided evidence that it sent Mr S an email on 29 May 2023 that gave the contact details of the Address Maintenance Team at The Royal Mail. I can see that on 9 September 2023 Mr S emailed our investigator to say he would look into amending the address with The Royal Mail but isn't the property owner. Again, I appreciate that puts Mr S in a situation where he'll have to ask the property owner to make those amendments which adds to the steps required. But the way Mr S' property is recorded with The Royal Mail isn't something I'm able to hold Equifax responsible for. And I'm satisfied that Equifax gave Mr S instructions on how to amend his address back on 29 May 2023, shortly after he raised his concerns. In my view, this was the right approach from Equifax and what I'd expect to see.

I'm sorry to disappoint Mr S but I haven't been persuaded there are grounds to award compensation due to the way Equifax handled his enquiries or reported entries on his credit file. I can see Mr S' flat number has been incorrectly recorded as "flat 1" in some of the entries on his Equifax credit file. But Equifax has explained that its systems are automated and where an unregistered address is used it seeks to match it to the nearest record available from The Royal Mail's database. As noted above, because Mr S' address isn't registered with The Royal Mail, it's not possible for it to be recorded on his credit file. I appreciate that the use of "flat 1" isn't right, but I think that reflects the fact Mr S is seeking to record an address that isn't registered which isn't something Equifax can do. Essentially, Equifax is unable to record an accurate address for Mr S due to the issues I've noted above.

Our investigator said Equifax should've contacted the businesses reporting on Mr S' credit file to notify them it was unable to verify the address details provided. But I'm not persuaded that's something Equifax can do or is realistic. I've looked at Mr S' credit file and can see various formats for his address being supplied. And I think it's fair to say that Mr S has access to his Equifax credit file so can look at how his address is recorded. I'm satisfied Equifax didn't need to tell the reporting businesses to contact Mr S to notify him how to correct his address format as it provided that information to him on 29 May 2023.

I agree that there are inaccuracies in the way Mr S' address is recorded by Equifax. But I'm satisfied that's because the flat Mr S lives in isn't recorded with The Royal Mail so doesn't feature on its database which is the source Equifax uses to verify addresses. Ultimately, until that is resolved, Equifax is unlikely to be able to accurately display Mr S' address as he wants. I'm satisfied Equifax notified Mr S of how to make those changes in good time and haven't seen anything that persuades me it's treated him unfairly. I'm sorry to disappoint Mr S but based on the information I've seen so far, I haven't been persuaded to uphold his complaint.

I invited both parties to respond with any additional comments or information they wanted me to consider before I made my final decision. Equifax responded to acknowledge receipt of the provisional decision but didn't provide any further comment.

Mr S responded to confirm he understood how I'd reached my decision. Mr S added he remained unhappy that Equifax had used "Flat 1" on his credit file when it was unable to locate his actual flat number.

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.

Mr S has explained he remains unhappy that Equifax amended his address to say Flat 1. But Equifax has explained that in the absence of a flat that matches Mr S' actual address its systems use the nearest available record. In this case, Equifax used Flat 1 as the next closest address record for Mr S. I appreciate that's not correct. But as noted in my provisional decision, Equifax provided guidance in May 2023 that explained the steps required for updating Mr S' address with the correct flat number. I remain of the view that was reasonable in the circumstances of Mr S' complaint. Once the address format is updated with The Royal Mail, I'm satisfied it's more likely than not that Equifax will be able to accurately report the correct format on his credit file.

I'm sorry to disappoint Mr S but I haven't found grounds to change the conclusions I reached in my provisional decision.

My final decision

My decision is that I don't uphold Mr S' complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 6 February 2024.

Marco Manente
Ombudsman