

The complaint

Miss W complains that someone else's information is showing on her Equifax Limited credit file.

What happened

In August 2022 Miss W contacted a business (C) that provides credit file information to customers having obtained the data from Equifax. Miss W raised a dispute as she found account information at an unknown address that didn't belong to her. C went on to raise the dispute with Equifax but it responded to say it was unable to find the account in question on Miss W's credit file.

Equifax responded further in mid September 2022 and asked if the information was registered at a different address. Equifax closed the dispute on 20 September 2022 when no response was received.

Miss W raised a complaint directly with Equifax on 20 October 2022. In Miss W's emails, she said she'd tried to resolve the issue of another person's debts showing on her credit file via C without success and that even more accounts had since been added in error. Miss W chased updates from Equifax on 6 November 2022 and 25 November 2022. Equifax has confirmed it opened a dispute with a lender reporting information on Miss W's credit file on 28 November 2022. The lender responded and confirmed the account had been registered as a result of a mistrace at the beginning of January 2023.

Equifax says it took steps to remove the account from Miss W's credit file. But Miss W says account information belonging to other parties remains on her credit file, despite Equifax's actions.

Equifax has told us that due to high work volumes at the business it wasn't able to investigate her complaint and issue a final response within the eight week time limit so provided referral rights to this service.

An investigator looked at Miss W's complaint and upheld it. They thought Equifax had failed to deal with Miss W's dispute in a reasonable time and weren't satisfied the underlying issue had been resolved. The investigator asked Equifax to continue working with Miss W to remove disputed accounts and pay her £200 for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Equifax asked to appeal and said that Miss W was a customer of C and that she was disputing information recorded on its report. Equifax said Miss W should've dealt with the dispute directly with C. Equifax added that when Miss W raised the issue as a complaint her case was placed in a queue but that it was unable to respond within 8 weeks. Equifax added that it raised a dispute with a lender in November 2022 and went on to remove the details from her credit file on 6 January 2023.

The investigator placed Miss W's case into the queue awaiting an ombudsman's decision in April 2023. In May 2023 Miss W sent in evidence that the other parties address remained

linked to her Equifax credit file and said it had failed to engage with her further to remove it. As Equifax asked to appeal Miss W's complaint it's been passed to me to make a 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.

Equifax's responses to us have said Miss W should've disputed the incorrect data via C as she was its customer at the time. But I can see Miss W did try and resolve the situation with C first. When, for whatever reason, that didn't result in the disputed data being removed Miss W contacted Equifax and raised a complaint directly. Whilst I take Equifax's point, the rules allow Miss W to complain directly to Equifax which is the business that provided the credit file data to C.

Miss W raised the complaint with Equifax in October 2022 and her case was placed in a queue. But I think the nature of Miss W's concerns ought to have led Equifax to consider investigating the dispute sooner. It wasn't until the end of November 2022 that Equifax first contacted a business about an account on Miss W's credit file. And that meant the response wasn't received until January 2023, with confirmation there was a mistake.

Whilst I'm pleased Equifax took steps to remove that data, Miss W says the issue still remains unresolved. As noted above, in May 2023 Miss W sent us a screen shot that appears to show the linked address remained on her credit file in relation to an account linked to a business I'll call L. As the address link and third party's credit information appears to remain on Miss W's credit file, I agree with the investigator that Equifax needs to do more to try and resolve the situation and remove disputed data.

I agree with the investigator that the service provided to Miss W should've been better and that it's fair to award compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused. And I'm satisfied that a payment of £200 fairly reflects Miss W's experiences and the way her dispute has been handled. So I'm going to proceed in line with the investigator's recommendations and uphold Miss W's complaint.

My final decision

My decision is that I uphold Miss W's complaint and direct Equifax Limited to settle as follows:

- Continue to work with Miss W and investigate the linked address and disputed accounts that may be showing on her credit file
- Pay Miss W £200 for the distress and inconvenience caused

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss W to accept or reject my decision before 9 August 2023.

Marco Manente
Ombudsman