

The complaint

Mr M complains that Halifax Share Dealing Limited (HSDL) has prevented him from being able to view his investment account online.

What happened

In November 2020 Mr M opened up an investment account with HSDL. He was sent an email on 6 November 2020 saying his account would be able to be viewed online within two days. In December, Mr M still wasn't able to view his account. He called Halifax – where he held his online bank account – and says he was told he wouldn't be able to view his investment account online. He was then passed to HSDL and was told the issue would be investigated but they couldn't provide a timescale and he could use the telephone service in the meantime. He was given £50 compensation for an issue with an email that went unanswered.

Mr M wasn't happy and referred his complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service in February 2021 as he still couldn't access his account. Our Investigator recommended HSDL pay Mr M a total of £150 compensation. He explained that although Mr M could've used the telephone service, he could reasonably have expected to have access online and this hadn't been provided.

HSDL disagreed. It said that the terms of the account say that when the online service is unavailable, a telephone service could be used. It said that as Mr M could've used this telephone service, it hadn't done anything wrong. It also said that HSDL is separate to Mr M's banking service and he should've contacted it directly rather than going through his bank which could've prevented some of the issues. As it didn't accept our Investigator's view, it asked for an Ombudsman to review the complaint.

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.

Having done so, I'm upholding this complaint. I'll explain why.

Much of the confusion that has been caused in this case is because Mr M has been under the impression that his HSDL account is run in the same way as his bank account – by the same entity. This isn't the case. However, I can see why he believed it to be. All of the correspondence he has received refers to "Halifax". He's been directed to his online banking account and, aside from the small print at the bottom of emails, there's no reference to HSDL. So, I first want to set out that I think it was reasonable for Mr M to be contacting his bank directly whilst trying to resolve the issue.

I can also see that he was told his account would be accessible online when he opened it. And this wasn't the case for quite some time. I fully acknowledge that the terms of the account provide for a telephone service to be used when the online service is unavailable. But I think it's reasonable for Mr M to have thought that any issues to online access would be

a temporary issue resolved quickly. But this didn't happen here, the issue remained unresolved for months. Mr M signed up to an online investment account, so I think it was reasonable to expect him to be able to access this online within a reasonable timeframe. I can't see that HSDL did enough to help Mr M through this process. Raising an enquiry and explaining there's no set date to resolve the issue didn't go far enough. I'm pleased Mr M had access to his account over the telephone during this time, but I think the months he spent without access online has caused him inconvenience and frustration.

As such, I think HSDL should pay Mr M a total of £150 compensation. I've not seen anything to suggest it did enough to help him, and I don't accept that he should've known, from the correspondence I've seen, to contact HSDL directly for the issue when all correspondence referred to "Halifax Online Investments Service" and had a standard Halifax.co.uk email address. Mr M had explained the issue multiple times, received conflicting information and wasn't able to access his account online for months.

My final decision

For the reasons I've explained, I uphold this complaint. Halifax Share Dealing Limited must pay Mr M a total of £150 compensation for the trouble and upset caused.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr M to accept or reject my decision before 5 July 2022.

Charlotte Wilson
Ombudsman