

## The complaint

Mr S complains that Equifax Limited were recording incorrect information about him on his credit file dashboard.

## What happened

I previously issued a provisional decision on this case, and a follow up email to let the parties know what I intended to decide on this case.

The background of the case as copied from my provisional decision as follows:

*In 2021, Mr S complained to Equifax because it was reporting information about him that he thought was incorrect. This included:*

- *a hard search which should have been removed.*
- *showing payments weren't up to date when they were; and*
- *reporting that nine months had passed since the last missed payment, when this should have stated zero.*

*Mr S said the reporting of this incorrect information had caused him pain and distress. Equifax responded to Mr S's complaint. It explained that the hard search had been removed as this had been requested by the data provider. However, it noted that there had been some display issues impacting some consumers, which meant that negative information had been incorrectly displayed as a missed payment on the dashboard. It said this issue had now been resolved.*

*Equifax said the information wasn't presented to lenders and therefore it wouldn't have impacted Mr S's ability to get credit – nor was Mr S's credit score impacted by this. Equifax also explained that it wasn't reporting a late payment, rather that one of Mr S's payments had not been verified to show as paid. Equifax acknowledged this reporting can be confusing, and that it would pass this feedback onto the relevant team.*

*Mr S remained unhappy with Equifax's response – mainly because it had agreed to uphold part of his complaint, however it hadn't offered him any compensation. Mr S said he wanted £150 compensation to put things right.*

*The Investigator looked into the complaint but didn't think it should be upheld. They explained that the hard search had been removed in a timely manner. And they felt that Equifax's explanation for the data being displayed on the dashboard was sufficient – and they didn't agree that compensation was necessary in this case.*

*Mr S didn't agree. In summary, he explained that his complaint was about how Equifax were incorrectly interpreting and presenting information on his dashboard. He didn't feel that it was fair of Equifax to report the "Q" status as a negative marker. Mr S has provided this service with evidence from the energy supplier to show that the "Q" status is intended to be neutral and not negative. Mr S also provided this service with evidence of his credit reports from two other credit reference agencies who haven't displayed this information as negative. And so, Mr S feels that Equifax are essentially reporting negative information about him*

*incorrectly, which he says has impacted him in a number of ways.*

In summary, I provisionally decided that the case should be upheld. While I agreed that Equifax were correct to report the “Q” status, I didn’t think that how it presented this in Mr S’s dashboard, as being a “negative payment marker” was an accurate reflection on what had happened in this particular case. I also thought that Equifax could have been more helpful in providing Mr S with information. It was my intention to resolve the complaint by asking Equifax to pay Mr S £250 and for it to change how it reported the “Q” status in Mr S’s dashboard.

Overall, Mr S agreed with the provisional decision however Equifax didn’t. Equifax said it couldn’t stop reporting the “Q” status in the way it was on the dashboard, however this is only viewable to Mr S, and not anyone else who might view his credit report, and so it didn’t think that £250 was a fair way to settle the matter.

I sent an email to both Mr S and Equifax to update them on what I thought about the case before coming to a decision. In summary I explained that this service doesn’t have the power to force Equifax to change its systems which would include how it chooses to represent the “Q” status internally to Mr S. But I still found that the matter had caused Mr S an unnecessary amount of distress and inconvenience and so I thought that Equifax should still pay Mr S £250.

Mr S responded and accepted what I said.

Equifax responded and strongly disagreed that it should pay Mr S £250. It said that it told Mr S in its final response that the information about the negative status wasn’t viewable to other lenders. It also added that Mr S didn’t explain any distress and inconvenience to this service until some years later. And made reference to the fact that Mr S had referred to DISP 3.7.2(4) which allows for a money award for distress and inconvenience. Equifax feel an apology for what happened is enough. Equifax also said that Mr S has been able to open multiple accounts while the “Q” status had been showing on his credit file, which shows there had been no impact to him.

### **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 considered everything on file, I will be upholding Mr S’s complaint.

The crux of this complaint arises from information Equifax had shown on its dashboard about Mr S’s payment history. When Mr S viewed the dashboard back in 2021, it said that Mr S had missed a payment. At this point, Mr S complained to Equifax. And Equifax responded to say that there had been an error in how it had displayed negative information on his dashboard. Negative information was being recorded as missed payments when they shouldn’t have been. Equifax confirmed that this was only visible to Mr S and not other lenders.

Understandably, this situation caused Mr S concern, given that he hadn’t missed a payment. While I accept that Equifax responded to Mr S’s complaint was within the regulatory timeframes, the fact remains that Mr S’s dashboard was incorrectly showing he had a missed payment for around six weeks. And until Equifax responded, Mr S says that he was worried about the impact of this on his credit file.

I accept Equifax's comments that this hadn't impacted Mr S in terms of being able to take out new financial accounts. Clearly, he had been able to do this. But given what Mr S has told us he has a mental health disability; I find that this situation has had more of an impact on him. My role is to assess the impact a mistake has had in the individual circumstances of the complaint. Sometimes an apology might be sufficient. But in other cases, it might not be.

It wasn't until later that Mr S checked his dashboard again, which had been updated to reflect that he hadn't missed a payment. But it now said he had a negative payment status. I can see Equifax's final response makes reference to this. But I think Equifax could have been more helpful here in explaining who was reporting the status, what the status meant, and what steps Mr S would need to take if he disputed the status.

Mr S says he wasn't aware until this service told him that the status showing to be negative was in relation to a "Q" status that had been applied by an energy supplier he was with. Mr S contacted the energy supplier and they let him know that the status wasn't intended to be negative, it explained the status was neutral. Given that Equifax refer to the status in his dashboard as a "negative payment marker", Mr S felt that Equifax were incorrectly interpreting the status. And his concern about this was that other lenders might be able to see this. I am satisfied that lenders can only see the status as being "Q", and they can't see the dashboard which describes it as being 'negative'. However, I can understand why Mr S was worried that Equifax were widely reporting that he had a negative payment status, because that what his dashboard tells him.

When I asked Equifax why it refers to the "Q" status as being negative in the dashboard, it said that it's because some lenders will view the status as a negative one. I accept that this is the case, however as Equifax said, this is up to the lender to decide. Given that it is Equifax's process to record the status as negative internally, I make no further comment on this, as I can't compel or order Equifax to change its processes. But in the circumstances, I can again understand why Mr S has been left feeling concerned.

Equifax say that this didn't impact Mr S, and that he was aware dashboard information wasn't viewable to other firms looking at his report, because it explained this in its final response letter. But the final response letter doesn't say that this information wasn't viewable to other lenders – it refers to the incorrect information about the missed payment not being viewable to other lenders. I don't think it would be reasonable for Mr S to have been aware that data reported on his dashboard wasn't also being reported externally. And I can understand why he thought that Equifax's interpretation of the "Q" status was being reported externally.

Given I find that Equifax could have done better, it is now left for me to decide a fair way to put things right.

### **Putting things right**

Equifax strongly feel that an apology is sufficient in this case. In some circumstances, I might agree with this. But taking into account everything that has happened here and the impact that this has had on Mr S's mental health, I think an award of £250 is fair. This is also in line with the published guidance on this service's website.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons set out above, I uphold Mr S's complaint. I order EQUIFAX LIMITED to put things right for Mr S by doing what I've said above.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or

reject my decision before 5 April 2024.

Sophie Wilkinson  
**Ombudsman**