

The complaint

Mr N wanted to open a joint account for himself and his wife with The Royal Bank of Scotland Plc. Mr N was advised to open the account himself and then add his wife later. Mr N said RBS didn't do what he asked. Instead, he said it tried to add his daughter and not his wife to the account.

What happened

Mr N chose to switch to RBS from another bank. He said RBS told him, he and his wife couldn't open a joint account through a single application. Instead, one of them would need to open a sole account and then set up to have the other person added as a joint account holder. Mr N didn't expect there to be any problems as when he had switched accounts some while before between other banks it had worked well. Mr N wanted to get the benefit of the switch incentive on offer from RBS.

Mr N opened an account. But the problems started when he applied for his wife to become joint account holder. Mr N said RBS tried to add his daughter rather than his wife to the account. Mr N said what should've been very simple became very complicated. He said there were stacks of letters and emails from RBS to him, his wife, and his daughter.

RBS investigated and accepted it had made mistakes. It offered Mr N £320 for the overall distress and inconvenience caused and a further £80 for the amount of time Mr N lost dealing with this. RBS said it acknowledged it failed to deliver the level of service Mr N was entitled to expect.

Mr N wasn't happy with this and brought his complaint to this service.

Our investigator didn't uphold the complaint. She said RBS hadn't produced some documents that would have been helpful evidence to decide clearly where the issues arose. But our investigator said she couldn't comment on RBS complaint handling or regarding Mr N's daughter's issues as she isn't party to this complaint. She accepted Mr N would've been frustrated by the difficulties adding Mrs N to the account. RBS did say if Mr N let our investigator know when he put in a new application, she could update RBS and it would track this to avoid any further problems. Our investigator also noted RBS accepted errors had been made and the service was poor. She felt the £400 compensation to acknowledge this was fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

Mr N didn't accept this and asked for his complaint to be passed to an ombudsman for a final decision. He didn't accept that RBS couldn't produce the evidence, and that the lack of evidence must be a systemic RBS issue.

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 N has stated throughout that he was trying to add his wife to the account he'd opened and that this was always his plan. If he had been able to open a joint account to start with, he would have done that from the outset. I don't think the point is disputed. The problems arise when Mr N got the impression from RBS that it was going to add his daughter rather than his wife to the account. Mr N is clear about the amount of correspondence and email traffic from RBS this created for all three of them.

Mr N said he and his wife haven't been able to use the joint account or get the benefit of the switching incentive that RBS offered at the time. Mr N said this really shouldn't be difficult, but he's got nowhere. Mr N said the RBS system is programmed incorrectly.

Mr N said the email to his daughter came as a complete surprise. She had nothing to do with the account and wasn't involved in the application. Mr N said his daughter hadn't uploaded documents or used his email account, so he told RBS this had to be a phishing attempt. Mr N said RBS has provided no evidence to show any application involved his daughter.

RBS said there was no data breach. It said the request to add parties to the account was made online and it can only involve a customer if the customer authorises it to use their details. It said it had two requests to add Mrs N to the account. One from Mr N and one from his daughter, but both from the same email account.

It did accept the customer service Mr N received was poor and the customer adviser should have looked into the problem more when Mr N requested it. Rather than send him off to a webchat and leave Mr N waiting for hours for webchat responses and being moved between various queues. Mr N was told he could ignore the emails sent to his daughter by RBS, but despite it saying this to Mr N it doesn't appear it was looking into the details and dealing with the matter. Overall, RBS accepted that it should've done better. RBS paid Mr N £320 for distress and inconvenience and £80 for the loss of time as compensation and an apology.

The matter still isn't resolved as Mr N doesn't yet have a joint RBS account with his wife. And several months have passed. I take Mr N's point about pushing RBS to produce the evidence to back up its claims of two emails from both Mr N and his daughter. But as RBS can't produce it, I accept Mr N's position that only he was involved in setting up the account and he clearly always wanted it just for him and his wife. RBS has had every opportunity to provide contrary evidence and hasn't.

RBS said Mr N could add his wife again to the account, or she could apply for an account herself through the "*Exceptions process*" and then in branch get added to the account. It also confirmed that if Mr N let our investigator know when another direct application for Mrs N had been submitted it would track the application to avoid further issues. I think that's fair. It seems from a systems perspective RBS need Mr N to follow certain processes again and although I totally understand that is frustrating, I can see that these would need to be used to put things right.

Considering the evidence and the amount Mr N would've got if the switch had gone through when it should've done, I think RBS has made a fair offer of compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused and Mr N's lost time.

For wider problems around systemic issues that Mr N feels RBS has - that would be for the regulator The Financial Conduct Authority if Mr N wishes to take that further. Issues around the complaint process and a lack of further answers from RBS after it sent its final response isn't a regulated activity, and so this service can't make a finding on such points.

My final decision

I don't uphold this complaint.

I make no further award against The Royal Bank of Scotland Plc.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr N to accept or reject my decision before 30 July 2024.

John Quinlan
Ombudsman