

The complaint

Mrs D complains that National Savings and Investments (NS&I) hasn't been able to locate the money from a bond and certificate which she has provided evidence of.

What happened

Mrs D found a '*Capital Bonds Customer's Receipt*' from June 1989 which showed that £100 had been deposited in her name as it was at the time, along with a '*Holders Card certificate*'. She says that her parents deposited money for her in relation to these documents and she had never received it. When Mrs D looked into where this money might now be, she found that any money associated with these products and services would now be held by NS&I.

NS&I said that it couldn't find any trace of any active accounts in Mrs D's name. Mrs D was unhappy with this and complained to NS&I, but it didn't change its position. It said that just because Mrs D has an original bond slip, this didn't mean it was still valid and hadn't been repaid. NS&I also said that it was limited in the information it had about historic repayments because of its responsibilities under legislation in retaining data.

Mrs D was unhappy with this and referred her complaint to our service. One of our investigators looked into it and worked with Mrs D and NS&I to see if there were any other searches, or information NS&I could use to help locate any funds associated with the bond, or certificate. As a result of this, NS&I located the Capital Bond on its systems, confirmed its value and stated it had been paid out in August 2016. In respect of the certificate though, NS&I said that it couldn't find any more information about this. That said, it explained that the relevant holding number had never been updated to a computer record, which suggested there were no unpaid certificates when the conversion to digital computer records took place.

Our investigator felt that NS&I couldn't do anymore in respect of finding the funds here. But they did feel that NS&I could have done more to locate the bond with the information that Mrs D gave it and to have told her what happened with it. She felt that NS&I should pay Mrs D £50 for that, but it didn't need to pay her the amount held in the bond as the records showed it had most likely already done that.

NS&I agreed to pay £50, but Mrs D disagreed with what the investigator said. She felt that NS&I must have some record of where the funds were paid to and remains adamant she has never received the money. So the complaint has been passed to an ombudsman to decide.

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.

The information that Mrs D gave NS&I can fairly be described as historic and the passing of time means that any searches it could carry out would be impacted by that. But in my view, NS&I has done as much as it can to try and help Mrs D here, based on the evidence I've seen.

In respect of the Capital Bond, the evidence from NS&I is persuasive that this was paid out back in 1996. I realise that Mrs D is certain she didn't receive any money from this bond – but NS&I's records are clear that it was paid out on a particular date in 1996. I think what's more likely than not to have happened here is that Mrs D has perhaps forgotten about the circumstances in which this bond was cashed. But whatever happened, I'm satisfied NS&I has done enough to show that it's not holding any money in relation to this bond.

I agree with our investigator that NS&I could have done more to have given this information to Mrs D sooner. This may have saved her some confusion and frustration. It's only fair that NS&I recognises the impact this had and I'm satisfied that £50 is fair for that.

In respect of the certificate, the card that Mrs D has isn't a record of an investment of a certain amount. It is just a card bearing the relevant holding number that would have been issued when a purchase of a Savings Certificate was made. A separate certificate would have been issued at the time bearing the amount and specific record of the investment.

Mrs D doesn't have that certificate though and NS&I says that any certificate like this would have been surrendered in order for the investment to be cashed in. So that suggests that Mrs D likely handed the certificate over if she no longer has it.

In any event, NS&I doesn't have any record of any money linked to this Holder's Card certificate. I think that's understandable given the passing of time – but I note that NS&I has given us a plausible reason as to why this is – which is that the relevant holding number has never been updated to a computer record, which suggests there were no unpaid certificates when the conversion to digital computer records took place.

That is a credible explanation, given the timeframes involved here. So in the absence of any other information, I think NS&I has persuasive explanation for what is likely to have happened to the funds associated with this certificate. Especially given the evidence of the unsuccessful searches NS&I has carried out to try and find any further information here.

Overall, I'm satisfied that NS&I has done as much as it can to help Mrs D in relation to the information she provided it. I do think it could have provided her a more detailed explanation of what happened with the Capital Bond much sooner than it did though. For the impact of that I think the £50 our investigator recommended is fair and so it's that NS&I must now pay to resolve this complaint.

My final decision

National Savings and Investments must pay Mrs D £50 for the inconvenience caused here.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs D to accept or reject my decision before 26 July 2024.

James Staples
Ombudsman