

The complaint

Miss L is unhappy with the service she received from Barclays Bank UK PLC.

What happened

Miss L called Barclays because she wanted to make a transfer from her account to a new payee. Barclays explained to Miss L that to add a new payee over the phone she would need a telephone banking passcode, which Miss L did not have at that time, but which Barclays then posted to her.

Upon receiving the telephone banking passcode, Miss L called Barclays back but was told that she also needed a telephone banking membership number, which was given to her by Barclays on the call. However, having received her telephone membership banking number, Miss L was still unable to add a new payee over the phone without going through further verification processes. Miss L wasn't happy about this, and she also wasn't happy that one of the Barclays agents she spoke with hung up on her and didn't call her back. So, she raised a complaint.

Barclays responded to Miss L's complaint and said that the first agents that Miss L had spoken with had followed the correct process. But Barclays acknowledged that the standard of service Miss L had received on a later call, and also when a call had been cut off abruptly, wasn't to the standard that they aspired to. Barclays apologised to Miss L for this and paid £50 to her as compensation for any upset or inconvenience she may have incurred as a result. Miss L wasn't satisfied with Barclays response, so she referred her complaint to this service.

One of our investigators looked at this complaint. They felt that Miss L hadn't been treated unfairly by Barclays regarding her initial interactions with them. But they didn't feel that the £50 Barclays had paid Miss L for the later interactions didn't provide fair compensation for the poor service Miss L had received, and they said that Barclays should pay a further £50 to Miss L as a result. Barclays accepted the recommendation of our investigator, but Miss L remained dissatisfied. So, the matter was escalated to an ombudsman for a final 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.

I've listened to several phone calls between Miss L and Barclays that pertain to this matter. The first of these took place on 24 June when Miss L asked to make a payment of £1,167.85 to a person who was not already listed as a prior payee on her account. Barclays agent explained that Miss L hadn't passed the necessary verification to be able to make a transfer to a new payee, and asked Miss L if she could verify herself via either Barclays mobile banking app or by receiving a text message to her mobile phone. Miss L confirmed that she couldn't, because she didn't use the mobile app and didn't have mobile phone signal where she lived.

Barclays agent then asked Miss L for two digits of her telephone banking passcode, which Miss L provided. But the agent then explained that the passcode was coming up as invalid, and Miss L explained that the passcode she'd used was received in May 2023. Barclays agent confirmed that this old passcode had expired and offered to send a new passcode to Miss L in the post, which Miss L consented to. The call then ends with Miss L agreeing to call back when the new passcode is received.

Miss L then calls Barclays back on 29 June and tries to make the transfer again. Barclays agent asks if Miss L has made the transfer to the intended recipient before, to which Miss L explains that she has, but usually from another bank.

Barclays agent then explains to Miss L that because she hasn't previously made a transfer to her intended payee with Barclays, she would need to verify herself via either Barclays app or by text message. Miss L, who always called Barclays from her landline phone, confirms that she can't verify herself via these channels and the call ends. On this call, Miss L makes no mention of having received her mobile banking passcode that had been posted to her by the agent on the previous call.

Miss L then calls Barclays for a third time on 9 July and again tries to make the transfer. On that call, Barclays agent explained to Miss L that even if the intended recipient was already listed as a payee that she wouldn't be able to process the transfer at that time. This was because Barclays agent hadn't been able to take Miss L through the necessary level of verification – either through the Barclays mobile app or by being sent a one-time passcode by text message to her mobile phone.

Barclays agent asked Miss L whether she had access to her mobile phone or online banking or whether there was a local branch that Miss L could visit, but Miss answered 'no' to all three of those questions (although it had been established on an earlier call that Miss L did have a mobile phone that worked, but which she couldn't use because of a lack of mobile phone signal at her house). Barclays agent then confirmed that as things stand, it wasn't possible to take Miss L through the required level of security to enable Miss L to make the transfer she wanted. But they did note that Miss L was registered for online banking which meant that she would be able to make the transfer via that channel if she chose to do so.

Miss L called Barclays for a fourth time later that same day and tried to make the transfer again. At that time Barclays agent attempted to send a one-time passcode to Miss L's mobile phone, but the poor mobile phone signal in Miss L's area meant that it couldn't be received. Barclays agent explained that in the absence of being able to take Miss L through the required level of verification, the transfer that Miss L wanted to make couldn't be completed.

Barclays agent also asked Miss L if she had her telephone banking passcode, which Miss L confirmed that she had now received and which she offered to give to Barclays agent. In response, Barclays agent explained that they wouldn't be able to verify Miss L with the passcode themselves, but that Miss L could call again and initially verify herself, in the automated part of the call at the start of the call, using that passcode, which would provide the required level of verification for Miss L to make the transfer she wanted to make. Miss L explained that she didn't have the time to call back on that day, and the call ended.

The next call I've listened to was on 16 July. On that call, Miss L began the conversation by asking to raise a complaint because when she'd tried to use her new mobile banking passcode, as the prior agent had suggested, she found that she was still unable to make the transfer that she wanted to make.

On this call, Barclays agent asked Miss L if she had her telephone banking membership number, which Miss L didn't have. Barclays agent then provided Miss L's membership

number to her and explained that when she called in, she would be asked to input the membership number over the phone and then input selected numbers from her telephone banking passcode.

However, Barclays agent also explained to Miss L that even using her mobile banking membership number and passcode, she still wouldn't be able to make a payment to a new payee, as she wanted to, without completing additional verification via either online banking or by text message sent to her mobile phone, which Miss L had already explained to previous agents that she couldn't do.

Barclays agent then asked Miss L if she could use online banking, wherein she'd be able to set up a new payee. Miss L said that she wasn't comfortable doing this, and Barclays agent confirmed that she did have an active online banking account and offered to talk Miss L through the process of setting up a new payee and making the transfer via online banking. However, Miss L declined this offer.

Miss L ended the call by reiterating her dissatisfaction that the previous Barclays agents she'd spoken with hadn't mentioned that she would need her mobile banking membership number. And she also explained that she had been on a call with Barclays earlier that same day which had been cut off and that the agent she'd spoken with hadn't called her back. Barclays agent confirmed there were no notes from any of their colleagues recording this call, and Miss L asked for this cut off call to be added to her complaint.

Miss L then called Barclays the following day and tried to make the transfer again. Once more, Barclays agent tried to take Miss L through the required verification process so that she could make a payment to a new payee – which would mean either using the mobile banking app or sending a text message to Miss L's mobile phone. Miss L confirmed that she was unable to verify herself via those methods, and Barclays agent explained that they wouldn't be able to process the transfer to a new payee that Miss L wanted to make.

Barclays agent then explained that if Miss L called back and verified herself during the automated section of the call at the start of the call using her telephone banking membership number and passcode, that she would then have passed the required level of security and would be transferred to an agent who could help her make the transfer she wanted to make.

This is in direct contradiction to the information that Miss L had been given the day before, when she'd been told that even if she used her membership number and passcode, she wouldn't be able to complete a transfer to a new payee unless she passed the further verification process (app or text-message) that she wasn't able to complete.

Miss L asked Barclays agent about this discrepancy in the information that she was being given, and Barclays agent apologised if Miss L had been given wrong information previously but stated his confidence that the information that he was providing to Miss L was correct.

Barclays agent then asked Miss L if she could use online banking or go into branch, which Miss L said she wasn't willing to do, and Miss L also explained that she wasn't willing to call back to try to verify herself using her membership number and passcode. In response, Barclays agent explained that if Miss L wasn't willing to undertake any of the steps they'd suggested, that she wouldn't be able to transfer the money as she wanted.

Following this, the quality of the call deteriorates, with Barclays adviser becoming noticeably frustrated with Miss L, who herself becomes increasingly frustrated in return. The call lasts for several further minutes, during which time Barclays agent speaks with Miss L in a tone that I feel wasn't to the standard that Miss L was reasonably entitled to expect, with the remainder of the call largely consisting of reiterations of information already given.

Having listened to these calls, I can understand Miss L's frustration at the inconsistent information she was being given about whether she would be able to instruct the transfer if she was able to pre-verify herself using her mobile banking number and passcode. And I also feel that the last agent that Miss L spoke with didn't speak with Miss L with the patience and understanding that Miss L was reasonably entitled to expect.

But I also feel that Miss L herself could and reasonably should have acted differently here to mitigate against the repetitive frustration that she was experiencing. For instance, Miss L could have called Barclays from her mobile phone in an area where there was mobile phone signal, so that she could have received a text message to enable her to verify herself to the required standard. Additionally, Miss L could have downloaded the Barclays mobile app to verify herself that way, or she could have gone into branch and completed the transfer there, although I acknowledge that this would have been a relatively long round trip for Miss L.

I also feel that Miss L could have conducted this transfer via internet banking, which Barclays confirmed to her on several occasions that she was set up to use. And this is especially the case given that one of Barclays agents very reasonably offered to talk Miss L through the internet banking transfer process while they remained on the telephone with her. Finally, I also note that Miss L confirmed in one of the calls with Barclays that she does have another account with another bank, from which she may have been able to complete the transfer she wanted to make.

In their response to Miss L's complaint, Barclays apologised to Miss L for the poor service she'd received, including that one of Miss L's calls to Barclays had cut off and that she hadn't received a call back. Barclays paid £50 compensation to Miss L for any trouble or upset she may have incurred as a result, and they accepted the recommendation put forward by our investigator to pay a further £50 to Miss L, taking the total compensation amount payable to £100.

Upon consideration, this seems reasonable to me. This is because Miss L did receive instances of poor service from Barclays, as described above, and including that Barclays didn't give Miss L consistent information about whether she would be required to verify herself via the app or by text if she did pre-verify herself using her mobile banking details. But as explained, I also feel that Miss L could have acted differently to mitigate against the frustration that she incurred, and that Barclays agents gave her reasonable opportunities to do so.

Accordingly, I don't feel that Barclays should fairly be held solely accountable for the trouble and upset that Miss L has incurred here, and I feel that £100 is a fair total compensation amount for the level of inconvenience and frustration that Miss L incurred for which Barclays should fairly be held responsible. And I confirm that this is in consideration of the general framework this service uses when assessing compensation amounts, details of which are available on this service's website.

All of which means that while I will be upholding this complaint in Miss L's favour, I'll be doing so only to instruct Barclays to pay the further £50 to her that they've already agreed to pay. And I won't be instructing Barclays to take any additional action beyond this.

I realise this won't be the outcome Miss L was wanting, and I hope that she's been able to resolve this situation moving forwards. But I trust that Miss L will understand, given all that I've explained, why I've made the final decision that I have.

Putting things right

Barclays must pay a further £50 to Miss L, taking the total amount payable to £100.

My final decision

My final decision is that I uphold this complaint against Barclays Bank UK PLC on the basis explained above.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss L to accept or reject my decision before 12 December 2024.

Paul Cooper
Ombudsman