

Mrs L B Hodgkins
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Cardiff
[REDACTED]

April 2000

Dear Mrs Hodgkins,

MERGER OF CYNCOED BRANCH WITH LLANISHEN BRANCH

As you know, patterns of banking are changing with less use being made of branch-based counter services as more use is made of plastic cards, telephone and Internet banking and cash machines. These changes mean that customers can do their banking at a time and place which suits them. As a result, all the major banks are having to face the commercial reality that they can no longer have as many branches as they had in the past.

Closing a branch is a hard decision for any bank to take and I apologise for any inconvenience caused to you by our reluctant decision to close Cyncoed Branch on 19 May 2000. To minimise any disruption, we will transfer your account to Llanishen Branch on 22 May 2000, giving you access to a wide range of services, as explained in the enclosed leaflet.

We will do all we can to make the move as smooth as possible. You will keep the same account number and, if you have one, the same Cashcard or Servicecard Personal Identification Number (PIN). The only number to change is the sort code which from 22 May 2000 will be 52-21-63. If you use our 24 hour telephone banking service your PIN will stay the same. However, when accessing the service from 22 May 2000 remember to use the sort code for your new branch.

With regards to regular payments into your account such as salary payments and share dividends, please advise the sender of the change to your account details – the new sort code number and the date of the change. This will avoid any delay in receipt of these funds.

You will receive a new cheque book and, if you have a Business Account or a Reserve Account, new paying-in books. If you also have a Cashcard or Servicecard, you will receive a new one nearer the time. There are no changes to any NatWest Credit Cards you may hold.

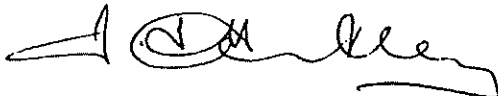
There are other ways of accessing your account which you may find convenient. For details of how you can access your account by telephone, Internet or via a network of 25,000 cash machines, please see the enclosed leaflet.

continued

If you have any questions at all, please call our Helpline on 0845 609 8765 (textphone number 0800 917 0527).

Several of the staff may be transferring to Llanishen Branch so there may be some familiar faces around when you call into your new branch. I also know the team at Llanishen Branch are looking forward to providing you with a first-class service.

Yours sincerely,



J I Hartley
Head of Customer Relations

CHRIS HODGKINS

My Ref: Chris/vy190400.doc

19 April 2000

Viscount Younger of Leckie
Chairman
Royal Bank of Scotland Plc
PO Box 31
42 St Andrew's Square
Edinburgh EH2 2YE

COPY

Dear Viscount Younger

NatWest merger of Cyncoed Branch (Sort Code:52-21-54) with Llanishen Branch

My mother (account no. 0651-4618) has been a customer of NatWest since the merger of the National Bank with the Westminster Bank and before that she held a current account with the Westminster Bank for more years than she cares to remember.

My mother has asked me to write to you because she is vexed and saddened and heavily inconvenienced by the decision of NatWest to close their Cyncoed Branch. As an 86 years old person with impaired sight the decision to move the Cyncoed Branch to Llanishen is the equivalent of moving her branch to the dark side of the moon.

I called into the Cyncoed Branch on Monday 17th April 2000 and found them to be less than helpful in supplying me with your name and address as Chairman of the holding company responsible for policy. There were no report and accounts for NatWest either on display or held behind the counter; the apparent reason was that two sets had been 'lifted' by customers. It was clear to me that the bank's staff were under strict instructions to divulge only the address of Customer Relations. As Customer Relations do not decide on policy they will be unable to effect a reversal of policy, so there is little point in writing to them.

I am aware that NatWest will want to maximise profits and that younger customers will be more attracted to internet banking cashpoints etc. However, the adoption of the current closure policy effectively discriminates against the elderly and therefore penalises account holders who are long-term customers. Furthermore, when I was at the Cyncoed Branch on Monday 17th I saw a high volume of customers transacting business at the counter.

The letter of J.I. Hartley, Head of Customer Relations at NatWest to my mother dated April 2000 stated:

~~.....~~ West Ealing London ~~.....~~
home ~~.....~~ work ~~.....~~

"As you know patterns of banking are changing with less use being made of branch-based counter services as more use is made of plastic cards, telephone and internet banking and cash machines. These changes mean that customers can do their banking at a time and a place that suits them."

I would have thought that if the NatWest Bank owed a duty of care to its customers and stakeholders and was also diligent in exercising its social and ethical responsibility, it would have been incumbent on the bank to take care of their long-standing customers who are elderly and infirm by providing them with the opportunity to bank at a time and a place that suits them.

I would be very grateful if NatWest would re-examine its policy on branch closures and reinstate the Cyncoed Branch. In any event, I would have thought that in terms of public relations and customer relations, a process of incremental change would be far more prudent than the brutal closure of a much needed branch. I urge and beseech you to reconsider the closure of the Cyncoed Branch.

Thank you for your help in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hodgkins

home [REDACTED] work [REDACTED] London [REDACTED]

Your ref

Our ref

Date 20 April 2000

Executive Assistant

Head Office

PO Box 31
42 St Andrew Square
Edinburgh EH2 2YE

Telephone: 0131 523 2049

Facsimile: 0131 557 9178

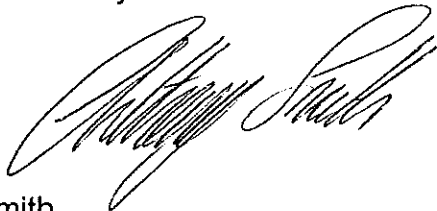
Chris Hodgkins Esq
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
LONDON
[REDACTED]

Dear Mr Hodgkins

In the absence of our Chairman, your letter of 19 April has been received here today.

I shall, of course, show your letter to Viscount Younger on his return. In the meantime, I have taken the necessary action to ensure that your comments may be addressed without delay.

Yours sincerely



A K Smith
Executive Assistant to the Chairman

Your ref:
Our ref: JIH/ESA

Mr C Hodgkins
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]



15 May 2000

Dear Mr Hodgkins

Thank you for your letter of 19 April to Viscount Younger of Leckie, which has been referred to me, as I am responsible for customer relations throughout our UK branch network. Allow me to apologise for the delay in replying.

I was sorry to read about the continued concerns you and your mother have in respect of the closure of Cyncoed Branch. I am also sorry that your anxieties were met with apparent indifference upon visiting the branch.

I do acknowledge your unease and appreciate the inconvenience caused to customers whenever a local branch closes. However, I assure you that we have been looking closely at our existing branch network with local management, as we need to take care that representation is spread sensibly throughout the country. Like any business, we keep reviewing how our branches are performing and whether customers are continuing to visit them. I stress that extensive investigations are carried out whenever we consider changes in the way the Bank is represented in any locality. The harsh reality is that the usage of Cyncoed Branch is relatively low, and whilst I respect your views, we will maintain our branch network wherever we can, but not where the costs outweigh the tangible benefits.

If we decide to close a branch, we do so only after careful consideration, and try wherever possible, to notify people as soon as is practicable after looking at all the alternative options available. This includes the siting of nearby cash machines and branches. I acknowledge what you say about the effect of the branch closure locally; especially for the elderly. Our staff are on hand to discuss any other ways in which the inconvenience caused by the change can be minimised, and help with planning future arrangements.

I am fully aware of the sensitivity of this closure but the Bank sometimes has to make difficult and unpopular decisions. The decision to close Cyncoed Branch was not taken without consideration of the consequences, and it is still planned to go ahead at close of business on 19 May.

I am obliged to you for taking the time and trouble to contact us with your views. I am sorry for the obvious disappointment you and your mother feel.

Yours sincerely

J I Hartley
Head of Customer Relations

CHRIS HODGKINS

My Ref: Chris/vy240500.doc

24th May 2000

Viscount Younger of Leckie
Chairman
Royal Bank of Scotland plc
PO Box 31
42 St Andrew's Square
Edinburgh EH2 2YE

copy

Dear Viscount Younger

NatWest Merger of Cyncoed Branch (Sort Code: 52-21-54) with Llanishen Branch

On the 19th April I wrote to you in good faith as the person who is ultimately responsible for policy at NatWest. I specifically stated in my letter (see attached) that there was little point in writing to J.I. Hartley, Head of Customer Relations as Customer Relations do not effect policy decisions. I was disappointed and surprised to receive a letter from J.I. Hartley which was nothing but disingenuous, mealy-mouthed, platitudinous, patronising, weasly worded claptrap and an abuse of the English language.

For example J.I. Hartley says "we will maintain our branch network wherever we can, but not where the costs outweigh the tangible benefits" which begs the question "tangible benefits for whom?"

J.I. Hartley demonstrably and singularly fails to answer my original letter of complaint which objectively and reasonably drew to your attention the legitimate concerns of my 86 year old mother who has been a customer of the Westminster Bank and then NatWest for more years than she cares to remember. In fact, J.I. Hartley's letter only serves to uphold my contention that 'customer relations' is at best an oxymoron and at worst a cynical deceitful sham.

The policy decisions that you have exercised are not only blatant age discrimination but they probably relieve you of a few of your customers who do not provide 'tangible benefits'! Andersen Consulting defines customer relation management as a discipline that encompasses "identifying attracting and retaining the most valuable customers to sustain profitable growth". This, when translated into the argot of greed: says "milk the punter for all they are worth and when they cease to make a bigger enough profit contribution throw them on the scrapheap", which sounds remarkably like NatWest policy on the available evidence to date.

Your delay in replying to correspondence probably allows you to think the closure of the branch will be a fait accompli. I feel sure politicians and the media will take more than a passing interest in this matter.

Therefore, I think it would be useful for you to revisit this policy decision and reinstate the Cyncoed Branch. In my original letter I mentioned that in terms of public relations and customer relations a process of incremental change would be far more prudent than the brutal closure of a much needed branch.

I look forward to hearing from you personally – sooner rather than later.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hodgkins

home [REDACTED] work [REDACTED] London [REDACTED]

Gordon F Pell
Executive Director & Chief Executive Retail Banking

 The Royal Bank of
Scotland Group

Your ref

Our ref

Date 1 June 2000

Level 21, Drapers Gardens
12 Throgmorton Avenue
London EC2N 2DL

Telephone: 020 7920 1568
Facsimile: 020 7920 1658
Website: www.rbs.co.uk

Mr C Hodgkins
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
London
[REDACTED]

Dear Mr Hodgkins

Thank you for your letter of 24 May, which Viscount Younger has given to me, as I am Executive Director and Chief Executive of the combined retail networks in NatWest and the Royal Bank of Scotland.

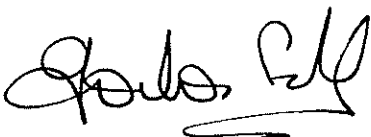
I am sorry that Mr Hartley's letter only served to fuel your dissatisfaction with our decision to close Cyncoed Branch.

Closing branches does not give me pleasure, especially as the fundamental competitive advantage of our business is locally held relationships. We cannot ignore, however, changes in local demographics and shopping habits driven by changes in our customers' preferences as to how they deal with their banking.

In the particular case of Cyncoed, a major factor was that NatWest has 18 branches within a 5-mile radius, so our commitment to representation in the Cardiff area remains as strong as ever. I know that my letter will disappoint you but the decision to close Cyncoed Branch cannot be reversed.

Thank you so much for taking the time to let us have your views.

Yours sincerely



CHRIS HODGKINS

My ref: rbs070600

7th June 2000

Gordon F. Pell
The Royal Bank of Scotland Group
Level 21
Drapers Gardens
12 Throgmorton Avenue
London EC2N 2DL

COPY

Dear Mr Pell,

Thank you for your letter of the 1st June 2000 which is the same type of egregious humbug and cant as dished out by L.I.Hartley. I am of the firm belief that you both must have attended the same risible school of letter writing. You have failed to grasp and comprehend the points made in my previous letters to Viscount Younger. For example, your two paragraphs:

"Closing branches does not give me pleasure, especially as the fundamental competitive advantage of our business is locally held relationships. We cannot ignore, however, changes in local demographics and shopping habits driven by changes in our customers' preferences as to how they deal with their banking.

In the particular case of Cyncoed, a major factor was that NatWest has 18 branches within a 5-mile radius so our commitment to representation in the Cardiff area remains as strong as ever. I know that my letter will disappoint you but the decision to close Cyncoed Branch cannot be reversed."

I pointed out in my correspondence that moving my mother's branch to Llanishen or any other branch within a five-mile radius was the equivalent of moving her branch to the far side of the moon. Furthermore, I drew to Viscount Younger's attention that it would have been incumbent on the bank to take care of long standing customers who are elderly by providing them with the opportunity to bank at a time and a place that suits them.

With regard to the fact that you "cannot ignore changes in local demographics and shopping habits driven by changes in our customers' preferences as to how they deal with their banking". Firstly, could you next time construct a sentence that actually makes sense and, secondly, the demographics you refer to are that the majority of customers at the Cyncoed branch are elderly and in your view probably do not constitute a viable proposition, so you dump them. Of course if this is not the case you will be happy to provide the numbers of customers at the Cyncoed branch and a profile of their age range and we all of us look forward to receiving that piece of information. Furthermore, you say that the "fundamental competitive advantage of your business is locally held relationships". If your perception of competitive advantage is "locally held relationships" then in this instance you have clearly lost competitive advantage. I see "locally held relationships" marching elsewhere where they will be valued. This is of course the kind of information your shareholders will fall over themselves to hear.

Mr Pell, if you and your colleagues had a glimmer of business nous you would have arranged a facility with the Post Office so that in the event of branch closure your customers would have a convenient place to cash and bank cheques. Lloyds TSB, Alliance & Leicester and the Co-Operative Bank have arranged such a facility which, to my mind -and lets not forget the minds of shareholders - puts you and NatWest at a clear disadvantage.

My mother, after having been through two world wars and, in the eventide of her life, is now faced with blatant age discrimination and financial fascism.

London

I look forward to hearing from you with the real reasons as to why the bank has shut. I am sure the press and many politicians will want to know and so will your shareholders, especially those shareholders who are at an age when NatWest thinks it is time to visit upon them financial euthanasia.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hodgkins

CHRIS HODGKINS

My ref: Chris/vl070600

7th June 2000

Viscount Younger of Leckie
Chairman
Royal Bank of Scotland plc
PO Box 31
42 St Andrew's Square
Edinburgh EH2 2YE

COPY

Dear Viscount Younger

I have had the misfortune to receive another delegated task from another of your minions. I enclose his letter and my reply.

It is clear from the correspondence you and your staff have abjectly failed to grasp and understand the points I have made. The obtuse correspondence from your staff leave me with the impression that to watch you and your colleagues reading my letters would be like watching a baby peering into the back of a watch.

I would have thought that you would have been able to summon the good manners to write to me in person or even apologise for the bank's appalling behaviour but to date that is not the case.

I trust, however, that you will ensure that Gordon F. Pell will supply me with the information I have requested and, for my part, I will ensure that the media and politicians are informed of NatWest's blatant age discrimination and financial fascism. Will you tell the shareholders, pension fund holders etc or shall I?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Hodgkins

[REDACTED]

Gordon F Pell
Executive Director & Chief Executive Retail Banking

 The Royal Bank of
Scotland Group

Your ref

Our ref

Date 29 June 2000

Level 21, Drapers Gardens
12 Throgmorton Avenue
London EC2N 2DL

Telephone: 020 7920 1568
Facsimile: 020 7920 1658
Website: www.rbs.co.uk

Mr C Hodgkins
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
LONDON [REDACTED]

Dear Mr Hodgkins,

Further to your most recent letter to Viscount Younger, I am sorry that you still consider my response to be inadequate.

To be specific, the age profile of the branch's customer base was evenly spread, with less than 20% aged over 60, a similar pattern to many of our branches. Let me assure you that this fact never featured in the decision to close Cyncoed.

I would like to reiterate that our desire to remain in the Cardiff area remains strong and our staff will be pleased to welcome all Cyncoed customers to the branches in the surrounding area.

I appreciate how strongly you feel about this matter and know that you recently contacted Jon Owen Jones MP for Cardiff Central. Mr Jones has written to Mr J Hartley, NatWest's Head of Customer Relations, who will be replying direct to him. I trust Mr Jones will share this letter with you.

Unfortunately, from your correspondence, I doubt that I, nor Viscount Younger, could add anything further to allay your concerns.

Yours sincerely,



CHRIS HODGKINS

9th August 2000

Independent Television Commission
33 Foley Street
London W1W 7TH

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: NatWest Plc

I have had the recent misfortune to view an advertisement by NatWest on Thames Television and HTV (analogue TV) which implies that NatWest does not close its branches and takes care of its elderly customers.

As all the enclosed correspondence clearly shows, this is not the case. I would be grateful if this misleading advertisement were investigated.

Yours faithfully,

Ch Hodgkins 

Chris Hodgkins

home [redacted] work [redacted] London [redacted]



Independent Television Commission

Mr Chris Hodgkins

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
London
[REDACTED]

Ref: 32227

Direct Line: 020 7306 7822

Direct Fax: 020 7306 7717

email: vena.raffle@itc.org.uk

31 January 2001

Dear Mr Hodgkins,

Your complaint about National Westminster Bank – Another Way advertising

Thank you for your letter of the 15 August 2000 and enclosures that set out the concerns you had about the above advertising campaign. We have investigated the points you and other viewers made, and have concluded that we agree with you. We are therefore upholding your complaint. I am enclosing a copy of the case summary, which will be published in our next Monthly Complaints Report, as that seems the simplest way to explain our conclusions.

I am sorry that it has taken some time to respond to you. However this has been a lengthy investigation, which included an appeal by the advertiser to which we were obliged to give due consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vena Raffle'.

Vena Raffle

Advertising Standards Officer

**MISLEADING NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK - AN
Advertising agency: M & C Saatchi**

COMPLAINTS FROM: 19 viewers

NATURE: An advertisement first aired on 17 July 2000 made a number of claims about National Westminster's service. Among these were that their programme of branch closures had been abolished and that monthly fees on arranged personal overdrafts were to be scrapped. The ITC received twelve complaints from viewers saying that branch closures were, in fact, still going ahead, and six complaints saying that overdraft fees would continue to be in operation until October or November 2000.

ASSESSMENT: The advertiser confirmed that two branches - one in Winchester and one in Cambridge - were still to be closed, despite the advertising saying otherwise. As soon as the television companies became aware of this information, they suspended the advertising. On the second point, the ending of overdraft fees, the television companies considered that the advertising did make it sufficiently clear that this was something due to take place in the future. Although the ITC agreed that the advertising was using the future tense when making this claim, it considered that the time lapse between the announcement and the ending of fees - more than two months - was unreasonably long. While it welcomed the broadcasters decision to suspend the advertising, the ITC disagreed with them in relation to the overdraft fees and judged the advertising to be misleading on both counts.

DECISION: Complaints upheld.