

July 2007

Our **MONEY**madeclear guides –
here to help you

This guide is part of our **Everyday money** series.



Available from our Consumer Helpline or website
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No selling. No jargon. Just the facts.

If you would like this guide in Braille, large print or audio format, please call our Consumer Helpline on 0845 606 1234 or Minicom/Textphone on 08457 300 104 (call rates may vary).

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**No selling.
No jargon.**

**Just the facts
about
basic bank
accounts.**

MONEYmadeclear
from the UK's financial watchdog (FSA)

With our **MONEY** made clear range of guides, we cut out the jargon and give you just the facts about financial products and services, helping you to make an informed decision.

Just the facts about basic bank accounts.



The Financial Services Authority (FSA) is the UK's financial watchdog set up by government to regulate financial services and protect your rights.

Remember, this is general information, and isn't the same as getting financial or other professional advice. For advice based on your own circumstances, talk to a professional adviser.

This guide is for you if

You want

or need a bank account to help you manage your money, but aren't able to have a current account.

It's about basic bank accounts and:

- explains what they are;
- how to get one; and
- answers some of the questions you may have.

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How basic bank accounts work

A basic bank account allows you to receive money and pay bills.

It can be a first step towards opening a regular current account later on.

See the *Jargon buster* on page 10 for an explanation of some words you may come across.

With a basic bank account you can:

- have your wages, benefits, State pension or tax credits paid directly into your account;
- pay in cheques for free (but remember you will have to wait a few days before the money is available for you to spend);
- take money out at cash machines with a cash card (this is usually free, but some cash machines make a charge);
- withdraw money at the Post Office®; and
- pay your bills by direct debit – meaning you could pay less for some things – especially gas, electricity or telephone.

Some banks will also let you pay by standing order.

Lots of banks and some building societies offer basic bank accounts – see page 4 for a full list.

Key points

With a basic bank account you:

- don't get a cheque book;
- can pay in cheques for free;
- can take money out at cash machines; and
- can pay bills by direct debit or standing order.

Key things to think about

When choosing your basic bank account:

Check that

you can use cash machines near where you live or work for free (ask the bank or building society if you aren't sure).

Check that

you can pay money in or get money out at a Post Office® branch, if this is important for you.

Check that

there is a branch of the bank/building society near you where you can pay in money and check on your account.

Check that

you will get the services you need like a debit card or standing orders.

Different types of basic bank account

This table shows which banks and building societies offer basic bank accounts and what services you can expect to get.

All these accounts accept **Automated Credit Transfer (ACT) payments**, offer cash withdrawals at the Post Office®, and a cash-machine card. None of them offer a cheque book.

| Bank name and any special name for the account | Minimum age to open an account | Minimum amount to open an account | Free buffer zone (see page 10) | Direct debits and standing orders ¹ | Charge for unpaid direct debit ¹ | Charge for unpaid standing order | Debit card (Solo, Electron or Maestro) | If any of the following apply to you, your application may be declined |
|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|---|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Abbey: Basic Account | 16 | None | No | Yes | £35 | £35 | No | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |
| Alliance & Leicester: Basic Cash Account | 16 | None | No | Direct debits only | £34 | No standing orders | No | Undischarged bankrupt |
| Bank of Ireland: Basic Cash Account (only available in Northern Ireland) | 16 | None | No | Yes | £38 ³ | £38 | No | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |
| Bank of Scotland: Easycash | 16 | None | No | Yes | £39 | £39 | Yes | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |
| Barclays: Cash Card Account | 18 ² | None | Yes | Yes | £15 | £15 | No | Record of fraud |
| Clydesdale: Readycash | 16 | None | No | Yes | £35 | £35 | Yes | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |
| Co-operative Bank: Cashminder | 16 | None | No | Yes | £19.50 ³ | £19.50 | Yes | Record of fraud |
| First Trust Bank: Basic Bank Account | 16 | None | £10 | Direct debits only | £38 | No standing orders | No | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud, record of bad debts |
| Halifax: Easycash | 16 | None | No | Yes | £39 | £39 | Yes | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |
| HSBC: Basic Bank Account | 18 | None | £10 | Yes | No ³ | No | No | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |
| Lloyds TSB: Cash Account | 18 ² | None | £10 | Yes | £35 | £35 | No | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |
| Nationwide Building Society: Flex Cash Card | 16 | £1 | No | Yes | £30 | £30 | No | Record of fraud |
| NatWest: Step Account | 16 | None | No | Yes | £38 | £38 | Yes | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |
| Northern Bank: Northern Personal Access | 14 | None | £10 | Yes | No | No | No | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud, record of bad debts |
| The Royal Bank of Scotland: Key Account | 16 | None | No | Yes | £38 | £38 | No | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |
| Ulster Bank: Step Account | 16 | None | No | Yes | £30 | £30 | No | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |
| Yorkshire Bank: Readycash | 16 | None | No | Yes | £35 | £35 | Yes | Undischarged bankrupt, record of fraud |

Explanatory notes

- ¹ Correct at time of publication but always check with the bank or building society.
- ² 16 and 17 year-olds can open a similar account.
- ³ The account may be closed if a direct debit is refused three times.

Source: British Bankers' Association, July 2007

This information is correct as at time of print, but is subject to change. Please check with your chosen bank or building society. We will update this table quarterly.

Your questions answered

Question

How do I keep track of my money with a basic bank account?

Answer

You will get a statement in the post, usually once every three months, showing what money has been paid in and what has gone out.

With most basic bank accounts you can check how much money you have and get a mini statement from a cash machine showing the most recent transactions.

Most accounts will also let you check your balance at a Post Office®.

Question

What if there isn't enough money in my account to pay my direct debit or standing order?

Answer

You can't go overdrawn with a basic bank account because you won't get an overdraft limit. But if you pay your bills by direct debit or standing order and there isn't enough money in your account, then the bank will not make the payment. You may be charged a fee or the bank may close your account if it has to refuse a direct debit payment three times.

You will still have to pay the bill as well as any charge. It is really important to make sure you have enough money in your account to pay your bills.

Question

What happens if I only have £6 left in my account and the cash machine only gives £10 notes?

Answer

If your account has a buffer zone, the machine will let you have £10 even if there is only £6 in your account. The bank will not charge you for going overdrawn up to the buffer-zone limit. If it doesn't have a buffer zone, you won't be able to take out £6.

You can take out the exact amount of money you have in your account over the counter either at your bank or building society or at a Post Office® branch.

Question

Can I open a basic bank account whatever my credit history?

Answer

Almost everybody should be able to open a basic bank account. The bank or building society may want to check your credit history to see if you have any county court judgments (CCJs) against you or have been made bankrupt. But even if you have, you may still be able to open an account – check the table on page 4.

Your questions answered

Question

What proof will I need to open an account?

Answer

The law says that banks and building societies have to identify their new customers. This is to help stop criminal activities like money laundering. They will explain which documents they will accept as proof of your identity, although this may vary from one firm to another.

They may ask you for a government-issued document:

- with a photograph (such as a valid passport); or
- without a photograph (such as a valid old-style driving licence) plus another document from an approved source.

If you don't have these documents, they may accept other documents such as a letter from a:

- government department or local council confirming your right to State

benefits (for example, pension, council tax or housing benefit); or

- care home manager or warden of sheltered accommodation or refuge confirming your identity.

They may even accept a letter or statement from an 'appropriate person' who knows you, such as a social worker or teacher, stating that you are who you say you are.

See our **Proving your identity** guide for more information – see *Useful contacts*.

Question

I don't think that I could use Chip and PIN – is there an alternative?

Answer

If you can't manage Chip and PIN, you can use Chip and Signature or a rubber stamp instead.

Next steps

Step 1

Decide which basic bank account would be best for you. Use the table on page 4 and think about the points on page 3 to help you decide.

Step 2

Be ready to prove to the bank or building society that you are who you say you are. If you have difficulty proving your identity, the member of staff dealing with your application can usually refer the matter to someone who is authorised to decide in exceptional circumstances.

Step 3

If you want to have your wages, State pension or tax credits paid directly into your account, talk to your wages office or the pension or benefit office dealing with your claim.

Step 4

To set up a direct debit or standing order to pay household or other regular bills, ask the company for a direct debit or standing order form. Direct debit forms are returned to the company that you want to pay, but you give a standing order form to your bank.

Jargon buster

Some key words and phrases explained.

Automated Credit Transfer (ACT)

Payment of wages, benefits, pensions and tax credits directly into a bank or building society account.

Balance

The total amount of money in your account, or the amount you owe the bank if you overdraw.

Buffer zone

A small amount of credit/overdraft that a bank may give you.

Cashback

A service that allows you to get cash from your account in supermarkets or other shops, using your basic bank account debit card.

Cash card

A card you can use to check your balance or withdraw cash from your account at cash machines, Post Office® branches, supermarkets or other shops. You cannot use a cash card to pay for goods or services.

Chip and PIN

The name for using a personal identification number to authorise payment from your account.

Credit check

A search of your borrowing record, also known as your credit history. A bank or other organisation carries out a credit check on a person when deciding whether to lend them money or to open a bank account in their name.

Debit card

A card issued by a bank that you use to pay for your shopping. The money is usually taken from your account immediately.

Direct debit

A way of paying bills from your bank account. You sign a form allowing the company you are paying to take the money directly from your account on specific dates.

They then take the money from your account automatically on the agreed dates. They have to notify you in advance before changing the amount or the dates of the payments.

Interest

A charge for borrowing money, or a reward for saving money. It is usually shown as a percentage of the amount borrowed or saved.

Money laundering

The process criminals go through to disguise and hide the money made from their crimes.

Overdraft

A facility allowing you to spend more money from your account than you have in it. The bank will usually charge you interest if this happens, and sometimes other fees as well.

Standing order

A way of paying bills from your bank account. You sign a form sent to you by the company you are paying. This sets out the amount to be paid and the payment dates. You then give this to your bank.

The bank pays the amounts from your account automatically on the agreed dates to the company you are paying. You must tell your bank if the amount or the dates of payment need to change.

Statement

A detailed list of all payments in and out of your account over a period of time, for example, three months. Ask your bank how often it sends statements.

Undischarged bankrupt

A person who cannot pay their debts and is still on the bankruptcy register.

Useful contacts

Call rates may vary – check with your telephone provider for their charges.

To order other Moneymadeclear guides, check our Register or for general information or guidance

Financial Services Authority (FSA)

Consumer Helpline: 0845 606 1234
Minicom/Textphone: 08457 300 104
www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk

Other Moneymadeclear guides

- **Proving your identity**
- **Credit unions**
- **Pensions**
- **Making a complaint**

To report misleading financial adverts or other promotions

08457 300 168

www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk

On our Moneymadeclear website you can find

- A **Budget calculator** to help you work out if you have enough money coming in to cover your bills.
www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk/tools/budget_calculator.html
- The **Financial healthcheck** to help you work out your financial priorities and make decisions about your money.
www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk/tools/financial-health-check.html
- Tables to help you **Compare products** like savings accounts and mortgages.
www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk/tools/compare_products.html

Organisations that can help if you have money problems

Advice UK

020 7407 4070

www.adviceuk.org.uk

All members provide free and confidential advice on a range of subjects, but not all provide money advice.

Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CABx)

See the Phone Book, Yellow Pages or website for your local Citizens' Advice Bureau.

www.adviceguide.org.uk

They offer advice on debt problems and a very wide range of other money and non-money topics.

Consumer Credit Counselling Service (CCCS)

0800 138 1111 (freephone)

www.cccs.co.uk

CCCS offers a structured programme on how to manage your money.

Credit Action

020 7436 9937

www.creditaction.org.uk

Provides information and guidance for people looking to manage their money better or to deal with debt or money worries.

Money Advice Scotland

0141 572 0237

www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk

Provides details of advice agencies throughout Scotland that provide a free, independent, impartial and confidential advice service.

National Debtline

0808 808 4000 (freephone)

www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

Offers advice on debt problems and free booklets and factsheets on dealing with debt.

Payplan

0800 716 239

www.payplan.com

Free confidential advice on debt problems.

Other helpful contacts

The Post Office®

08457 223344

www.postoffice.co.uk

To find out where your nearest Post Office® branch is.