

RBS taught us to forge signatures, says whistleblower

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Banking



RBS has denied falsifying customer records and has "robust whistleblowing processes in place"

PHILIP TOSCANO/PA

Police and finance watchdogs are being asked to investigate claims that Royal Bank of Scotland staff were trained in how to forge customers' signatures.

Managers were coached how to fake the names on key customer documents, according to whistleblowers at the bank. They claim staff were taught how to download genuine signatures from the bank's online system, trace them on to new documents by holding them against a window and to photocopy the paperwork to avoid detection.

Forging signatures is said to have been common practice in banks wanting to speed up paperwork and was also used to open accounts and for loans.

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Details of the allegations will be handed to the police, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and the head of the Treasury select committee. They came to light after the launch of Bank Confidential, an organisation that aims to root out unacceptable practices in the big banks.

Norman Lamb, the Liberal Democrat MP, is raising the issue on behalf of Bank Confidential. Mr Lamb said: “These are very serious allegations. I am trying to secure a face-to-face meeting with the FCA and its head, Andrew Bailey, to ensure these claims are investigated. I am also contacting police about the fraudulent behaviour, which is of course, a criminal matter.”

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Other politicians have expressed concern and urged RBS to be transparent and open with its customers.

Murdo Fraser, the Scottish Conservative finance spokesman, said: “Customers are already fed up with RBS which, having been bailed out by the taxpayer, is now leaving communities in the lurch with branch closures.”

One whistleblower, a former RBS employee who worked for the bank for more than 12 years, told *The Mail on Sunday* he was trained to copy customer signatures in 2005 on his first week of training as a finance manager. He said he was told that he might have to copy a signature sometimes if a customer left without signing a document or if there were spot checks.

He added: “The manager told me I could download signatures which were stored on the signature verification section of a customer’s records, then trace it on to another document where the signature was missing.”

Three other whistleblowers confirmed they were aware of staff routinely forging customer signatures.

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This is not the first time the bank has been linked to allegations of forged signatures. In 2012, two insurance firms owned at the time by RBS were fined £2.17 million for forging staff signatures on customer complaint documents.

An RBS spokesman said: “RBS takes any allegations of misconduct very seriously. We have robust whistleblowing processes in place, as required by the regulator. Many of these allegations date back a number of years and have been thoroughly investigated by RBS and other bodies, including the courts.

“No evidence has been found to support them. We deny manipulating or falsifying customer records to suit our purposes.”

•Ian Blackford, the SNP’s Westminster leader, says he has held “productive” talks with RBS over its plans to close scores of bank branches, including some in remote areas. Mr Blackford, the MP for Ross, Skye and Lochaber, said discussions were “moving in a positive direction” and he was hopeful that a breakthrough could be found. RBS says that it is responding to changes in customer behaviour, including a rise in digital banking. It declined to comment on Mr Blackford’s remarks.

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