

# Blame business schools for language barrier

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How do Norwich people feel about being “customers” in their very own City Hall? Citizens of our Fine City entering the seat of our government these days are greeted with a sign directing them to the “Customer Service Centre”. That feels wrong. Surely no one who lives in Norwich is a “customer” of the City Council? Doesn’t that word suggest the wrong kind of relationship?

We have already watched with some bemusement as our railways have fallen victim to the language of the Business School graduates who run them. They don’t want us to think we’re passengers anymore. They too want us to think we are “customers”.

We don’t think that of course – we still refer to ourselves as passengers. And no real railwayman or woman who has worked their way up through the ranks would normally say “customers” either. They only say that because they have been instructed to do so when making public announcements – presumably on pain of whatever it is that Business School-educated managers do to you, if you don’t say exactly what they want you to say.

When the friendly, experienced railway people who actually meet the public are talking to you face to face, they always say “passengers”. And they’re quite right, because this use of “customer” is very odd. It’s not what “customer” means. In normal everyday English, the word is used of



**CUSTOMER DISSATISFACTION:** There are some strange signs at City Hall.

people buying things in shops. People attending the doctors surgery are not customers, they’re patients. People at the solicitor’s aren’t customers, they’re clients. People staying at a hotel are guests. People visiting museums are visitors. People at Carrow Road are spectators.

And people travelling on trains are passengers. Everybody knows that. Why don’t the railway managers know it? We can’t blame it on our local railway being run by the Dutch.

The managers were trying to persuade us we weren’t passengers even before the new company took over.

And why don’t the City Council know we’re not customers? Surely we are Norwich, and Norwich is us? Do we not elect the City Council? Are we not all in this together?

I’m afraid it’s beginning to look as if we aren’t all in this together any more.

Not only are our elected officials using this strange, alienating vocabulary about us, but the citizens of Norwich are not even allowed to use the toilets in City Hall any more, even though it does actually belong to us.

■ **What do you think? Email: [EDPletters@archant.co.uk](mailto:EDPletters@archant.co.uk)**