

**Open Letter**

8 December 2021

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: The abuse of customer-facing workers**

The combined impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit and widespread stock and labour shortages have placed an intolerable strain on the relationship between customers and businesses.

Customer facing employees across all industry sectors – not just retail, but train guards, those in hospitality roles or engineers and call centre staff, are dealing with an increasingly frustrated and disenfranchised public, leading to unacceptable levels of hostility and abuse. Our research reveals over 60% have faced hostility in the last 12 months – ranging from shouting and swearing to racial abuse, death threats, spitting and physical attacks.

As we approach the busy festive period – a combination of frustrations over stock shortages and late deliveries, combined with the pressures of the rising cost of living, could cause abuse and hostility to rise still further.

This behaviour is not only morally unacceptable, but damaging to our efforts to rebuild our nation's economy. Far more than an occasional curse word – our research reveals damaging long term psychological impacts of this behaviour are leading to rising levels of sick days, resignations and a growing refusal to do vital work that directly serves the public.

The Institute of Customer Service, with the support of over 200 organisations and parliamentary champions from across the political spectrum, is calling for a new offence to address those that abuse staff in customer-facing roles. This will provide the deterrent needed to stop the worst offenders and give victims the confidence that their voice will be heard, and action will be taken.

We also urge businesses to provide adequate training to ensure employees are prepared for the increasingly demanding requirements of their role and for all customers to moderate their own behaviour.

Customer-facing workers not only played a vital role in keeping our nation running in recent times, but will also be the backbone of our economic progress. They deserve our respect – and this starts with providing a working environment free from hostility and abuse.

Yours faithfully,  
Jo Causon, CEO, Institute of Customer Service  
**List of signatories overleaf**

Adrian Furness, CEO, Covea Insurance  
Andy Wood, CEO, Adnams Brewery  
Angela Lockwood, CEO, North Star  
Ant Middle, CEO, Ageas  
Chris Pitt, CEO, first direct  
David Done, CEO, RHP  
David Wood, CEO, Wickes  
Giles Hawke, CEO, Cosmos Tours  
Graham Edwards, CEO, Wales and West Utilities  
Heidi Mottram, CEO, Northumbrian Water  
Jac Starr, CEO, Rail Delivery Group  
Joanna Swash, CEO, Money Penny  
Joe Garner, CEO, Nationwide  
Lindsey Rix, CEO, Canada Life  
Liz Garfield, CEO, Severn Trent  
Mike Lewis, CEO, Eon  
Neil Jones, CEO, Bobst  
Nick Read, CEO, Post Office  
Paul Hudson, CEO, Cirencester Friendly  
Paul Philpott, CEO, Kia  
Rosemary Du Rose, CEO, Beyond Housing  
Ruth Cooke, CEO, Green Square Accord  
Sarah Bentley, CEO, Thames Water  
Sian Fisher, CEO, Chartered Insurance Institute  
Simon Roberts, CEO, Sainsburys  
Steve Rowe, CEO, Marks and Spencer  
Tony Buss, CEO, Arag  
Giles Hurley, CEO (UK & Ireland), Aldi  
Aimee Chapell, CEO Customer Management, Capita  
Andy Whatmough, MD, S&G Response  
David Roberts, MD, NuHeat  
Eric Leenders, MD, UK Finance  
Jo Upward, MD, Platform Group  
Joanne Casey, MD, Mactaggart & Mickel Homes  
Paul Harris, MD, Curo  
Steve Holiday, Chairman, CityFibre  
Fintan Connolly, Chief Business Officer, Bidvest Noonan  
Richard Pash, Chief Customer Officer, Zurich

Peter Markey, CMO, Boots UK  
David MacLeod OBE, Co-Founder, EFS  
Colin Jones, COO, Sky  
Guy Jefferson, COO, Scottish Power Energy Networks  
Jane Porter, COO, Optivo  
Jonathan Cowie, COO, Vivid Housing  
Matt Gore, COO, Pension Insurance Corporation  
Oke Eleazu, COO, Bought By Many  
Carla Thomas, Customer Experience Director, Openreach  
Jamie McDonald, Customer Experience Director, VIVO Defence Services  
Karen Coleman, Customer Experience Director, Wesleyan  
Kathryn O'Brien, Customer Experience Director, TransPennine Express  
Martyn Oakley, Customer Experience Director, Laithwaites Wine  
Louise Beardmore, Customer Service Director, United Utilities  
Nigel Purveur, Director, NJP Management  
Peter Carter, Director, Independent Healthcare Consultant  
Fran Rea, Director Customer of Service, NewDay  
Mark Gait, Director Customer of Service, Virgin Media O2  
Kate Webb, Director of Customer and Product Experience, Parcelhub (Part of the Whistl Group)  
Ian Fielder, Director of Operations, Vanquis Bank  
Trafford Wilson, Executive Director of Customer Service, The Guinness Partnership  
Andy Pymer, Executive Director, Finance & Regulation, Wessex Water  
Ben Fletcher, Group CFO, The Very Group  
Jessie Burrows, MD - Customer Sales, Service and Claims, Direct Line Group  
Tara Mullen, UK Retail Director, Octopus  
Joe Gordon, VP of Customer Care, Ovo Energy

Alison Thewliss MP, SNP  
Baroness Bennett, Green (Peer)  
Carolyn Harris MP, Labour  
Charlotte Nichols MP, Labour  
Chris Evans MP, Labour  
Esther McVey MP, Conservative  
Martyn Day MP, SNP  
Philip Davies MP, Conservative  
Steven Bonnar MP, SNP  
Wera Hobhouse MP, Lib Dem  
Grahame Morris MP, Labour