unhealthy barrier between occupier and landlord, the argument runs. The word “tenant” reflects the fact that landlords care about the people who inhabit their buildings. But do they?

Benchmarking for occupier satisfaction has only recently been embraced. Curiously, theRICS called last year’s first attempt to survey and measure occupier satisfaction the RCS tenant satisfaction index.

While the index’s name may not have gone down well, the RCS’s efforts certainly have.

According to Paul Harrington, head of real estate at PriceWaterhouseCoopers, the index is essential if landlords are to improve their services.

Harrington says that the industry’s main representative bodies – the British Council for Offices (of which he is a board member) BPI, International Property Federation and the RICS – are pooling information to create a standard industry-wide index.

Two main customer gripes have surfaced so far: The biggest issue is with communication, with occupiers complaining that managing agents and landlords simply do not listen to them enough.

Tenants are also unhappy with the property services they receive and feel that landlords are not making enough effort to find out whether their services are up to scratch.

Remedial action

Harrington says that major property companies, such as British Land and Land Securities, are already working hard to improve communication.

"But there is still a problem with smaller landlords being too distant from customers," he says.

Arlington’s Shaw says that his company has been implementing best practice in communications for some time.

"We’ve been aware for several years that the best way to enhance the value of a property is to provide good customer service," he says.

“We provide a customer satisfaction questionnaire and a service desk in our buildings where customers can tell us about problems at any time. We measure our service levels on the speed of response and the speed of completion of the work required. And every week we sit down and study the findings and the feedback.”

Arlington’s Shaw says that occupiers also want better communication with their neighbours. "At our parks, for example Clissold Park, there hasn’t been an introduction of horticultural events to try to tackle this – pot-paints and sheep-shearing events through to learning to play golf," he says.

Williams adds that the biggest change in occupier requirements in recent times has been the desire to move closer to work. "In opposition to all previous thinking, occupiers want to be where competition are," he says.

Algoep, one of the UK’s best-known office architects, says that corporate companies have realised that offices play a vital role in attracting and retaining staff.

"He cites the recent invitation to Calgary, in Canada, where he was asked to advise on regeneration plans for its central office district, as an example of shifting attitudes."

In the case of Calgary, the companies have difficulty in recruiting staff and so are on one another, driving up

“We have been aware for several years that the best way to enhance the asset value of a property is to provide good customer service,” Charles Shaw, Arlington says. But they are coming to the conclusion that if their buildings were more pleasant then there would be more chance of keeping staff.

"The building here are full, like 1969-70 London. They have got their heads around the importance of design issues in buildings as good lighting, throughout and flexibility in layout."

Algoep cites the Palmeira building in Southwark, which he designed for Maxis Office Investments, as a good example of how “common-sense” design will attract occupiers.

"Transport for London plot: 200,000 sq ft at the 300,000 sq ft Blackfriars Road, S11, scheme at around £3.13 per sq ft this year. The London Development Agency and the Greater London Authority’s design for London advisory group, launched in June, has taken the remaining 300,000 sq ft.

"A well-designed building that captures the imagination is important to us. Additionally, you need to create space, that workers enjoy. One factor at Palmeira was the large terrace on the seventh floor."

Algoep says he had to battle with the