

Dear XXX,

Re: Acceptance of Pleas

The guilty plea rate in the Crown Court is 73% and dealing with guilty pleas properly is increasingly important. In recent months victims and their families, the Court of Appeal and the Attorney General have brought to my attention cases where the pleas, or bases of pleas, have been accepted inappropriately.

In December last year the President of the Queen's Bench Division wrote to me indicating that he will refer to me cases which give him cause for concern so that I can look into them. For my part, I have indicated that I will investigate the cases referred to me and ask counsel for an explanation. More broadly, I have assured the President of the Queen's Bench and the Attorney General that I will do all that I can to ensure that only appropriate pleas, on a proper basis, are accepted by the prosecution.

To that end, I have required all prosecutors employed by the CPS to take, and pass, a rigorous e-learning course on the acceptance of pleas. This process is nearly complete.

However, it is the collective view of the President of the Queen's Bench Division, the Attorney General and me that the acceptance of inappropriate pleas, or bases of pleas, is not by any means confined to prosecutors employed by the CPS but extends to the self-employed Bar, both junior and senior.

I would therefore like to work with Advocate Panel members to address the issues. The CPS is currently exploring with the Bar how we can engage in joint and shared training; in particular we are discussing how the e-learning course on the acceptance of pleas can be made available to CPS Advocate Panel members (carrying with it CPD points). In the meantime can I urge you to re-familiarise yourself with the Attorney General's guidelines on the acceptance of pleas, accessible via the following link:

[http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.uk/Publications/Pages/AttorneyGeneral'sguidelinesontheacceptanceofpleas\(revised2009\).aspx](http://www.attorneygeneral.gov.uk/Publications/Pages/AttorneyGeneral'sguidelinesontheacceptanceofpleas(revised2009).aspx)

It is axiomatic that when a plea is accepted to a less serious offence than is demonstrated by the evidence or a basis which does not properly reflect the victim's experience, a great deal of damage is done to public confidence in the criminal justice system.

I have discussed this letter with Michael Todd QC, the Chairman of the Bar and with Max Hill QC, the Chairman of the Criminal Bar Association and they both support this initiative.

I look forward to working with the Advocate Panel on these issues; and have copied this letter to the Lord Chief Justice, the President of the Queen's Bench Division, to all Resident Judges and to the Attorney General.

Yours sincerely,

KEIR STARMER QC
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS