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Televised court of appeal session cuts sexual assault jail term

One of the first cases broadcast live on TV shows judges cutting four-year sexual assault sentence to 32 months

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The Royal Courts of Justice, which houses the court of appeal of England and Wales. The system has been designed so that it can be disassembled easily and moved to other courtrooms used by the court of appeal. Photograph: Graham Turner for the Guardian

A man who pretended to be a taxi driver and sexually assaulted a young woman who got into his car has won a reduction in his jail sentence.

Two appeal court judges in London cut the original four years' imprisonment imposed in the case of Mashain Pitchei, 45, of Tring, Hertfordshire, and replaced it with a new jail term of 32 months.

His challenge against the sentence handed down at St Albans crown court in April, following his earlier guilty plea to sexual assault, was allowed by Mr Justice Globe and Judge Anthony Morris QC.

Pitchei's case is one of the first to be broadcast from the appeal court after a near 90-year ban on allowing cameras in court was lifted.

It was argued on his behalf on Friday that the original custodial term was "manifestly excessive".

The appeal judges found that the sentence was "too long", even taking into account the "aggravating features" of the offence.

Giving the ruling of the court, Judge Morris said the offence took place in October last year when Pitchei sexually assaulted a young woman who had been out with friends in Hemel Hempstead.

Morris said a CCTV operator saw her on camera and "seeing her state was concerned for her welfare".

He added: "In a very public-spirited way he thereafter monitored her movements on camera."

The judge said that in the early hours the woman, who cannot be

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identified for legal reasons and was referred to as "K" in court, walked across a road to Pitchei's car which was parked behind a line of taxis.

"The appellant is not a taxi driver, but it appears that K thought that he was," he added.

She got into the front passenger seat and the car was seen to drive around for about six minutes. It stopped in a dark area and then the vehicle's lights went out.

Morris said the CCTV operator "was so concerned for the safety of K that he called the police immediately".

One of the aggravating features of the offence identified was the degree of planning and premeditation involved in his pretending to be a taxi driver to "lure" a woman into his car so he could sexually assault her.

The appeal judges said they considered the appropriate sentence after a trial would have been four years, "which after giving full credit for the guilty plea should be reduced to 32 months imprisonment".

Quashing the sentence and replacing it with the 32 months, Morris said: "To that extent this appeal is allowed."

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