

For discussion on
28 April 2025

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PANEL ON PUBLIC SERVICE

Commendation Schemes for Civil Servants

Purpose

The Government has endeavoured to encourage civil servants to strive for excellence and provide quality public service through various commendation schemes. This paper reports to Members the relevant schemes and the latest progress of their implementation.

Background

2. The civil service is the backbone of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (“HKSAR”) Government. Its capability and efficiency is the key to success in the implementation of the Government’s policies. The Chief Executive’s 2024 Policy Address (“Policy Address”) has proposed a series of policy measures to continuously strengthen civil service management as well as advance the reward and punishment system, with a view to further enhancing governance capabilities of the civil service. The Government will continue to implement various commendation schemes for civil servants, including the Chief Executive’s Award for Exemplary Performance, the Secretary for the Civil Service’s Commendation Award Scheme, the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme, the Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme, the HKSAR Honours and Awards System, and the Commendation Letter Scheme, so as to give due recognition to civil servants with outstanding performances and dedication to serving the community.

Commendation Schemes for Civil Servants

(a) Chief Executive’s Award for Exemplary Performance

3. The Government launched the “Chief Executive’s Award for Exemplary Performance” in the second quarter of 2023 to give recognition to exemplary teams or individuals. Acclaimed contributions may come from

different areas, such as spearheading reform in organisational culture, accomplishing “missions impossible” by overcoming obstacles, saving resources while substantially enhancing efficiency, and exceeding requirements and targets of important tasks. There is no limit on the number of teams or individuals to be acclaimed each time but their performance has to be outstanding enough to warrant commendation. The Government will publicise the “good stories” of the award recipients so that the public can have a better understanding of the Government’s work and the excellence of the civil service.

4. The Task Force on Basic Law Article 23 Legislation (“the Task Force”) comprising the Department of Justice, the Security Bureau and the Hong Kong Police Force was announced as the award recipient for the second round¹ of the “Chief Executive’s Award for Exemplary Performance” on 18 June 2024. The Safeguarding National Security Ordinance was unanimously passed by the Legislative Council (“LegCo”) on 19 March 2024 and took effect on 23 March 2024. The HKSAR completed the legislation for Article 23 of the Basic Law. The Task Force completed its legislative work in a highly efficient and expeditious manner, from launching the consultation, drafting legislative proposals, explaining the contents of the bill and rebutting untruthful remarks, to assisting the LegCo in scrutinising the bill. The bill was finally passed unanimously. The Task Force worked at full steam and with whole-hearted commitment during the process, demonstrating the team’s resolute determination in safeguarding national security and fully upholding the principle of “One Country, Two Systems”, thereby setting a role model for the civil service.

5. Upon completion of the assessment exercise, we widely publicised the good stories of the Task Force’s award-winning good stories through diversified channels, including a 23-minute television special jointly produced with the Radio Television Hong Kong (“RTHK”) which premiered on RTHK TV 31 during the prime time (i.e. from 8:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.) in August 2024. The television special was also arranged for repeated broadcast on RTHK TV 31 and 32 in the subsequent two months. Besides, the video was uploaded onto social media platforms and arranged for broadcast at over 500 government venues. Moreover, there was extensive media coverage on the outstanding performance of the award-winning team by over 30 Hong Kong and Mainland electronic, print and online media agencies, effectively promoting the public’s understanding of the good stories of the award-winning Task Force.

¹ The inaugural “Chief Executive’s Award for Exemplary Performance” was granted to the HKSAR search and rescue team that carried out search and rescue operations in quake-stricken areas in Türkiye.

(b) The Secretary for the Civil Service's Commendation Award Scheme

6. The Secretary for the Civil Service ("SCS") gives recognition each year to civil servants selected on a service-wide basis for their consistently outstanding performance under this scheme which is specific to the civil service. To qualify for an award under the scheme, a civil servant should have put up outstanding performance for at least five consecutive years. The target number of recipients per annum is 100. Nominations are made by Permanent Secretaries or Heads of Departments/Grades. Recipients of awards are selected by SCS on the recommendation of an Award Committee comprising representatives of the Civil Service Bureau ("CSB") and other bureaux/grades. Each award recipient receives a certificate of recognition and a commemorative award. Those who have 20 or more years of service² and have yet to enjoy government sponsored travel outside Hong Kong will receive a travel award as well³. The award granted will be recorded in the personal file of the recipients to recognise their outstanding performance.

7. The Policy Address proposed to enhance the SCS's Commendation Award Scheme by lifting the minimum service length requirement for granting of travel awards to awardees from 2024 onwards, with a view to further motivating civil servants to strive for excellence. For award recipients who have yet to receive a travel award, they can be granted a travel award irrespective of their years of service. In 2024, 100 civil servants from 42 bureaux/departments ("B/Ds") were commended, covering 51 different grades, including professional and technical grades, disciplined services and general grades. Among them, a total of 12 civil servants with 5 to 17 years of service received the travel award, with the most junior one having only 5 years of service. We hope that the above enhancement measure can further motivate civil servants (including those with shorter service) to strive for excellence.

(c) Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme

8. The Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme aims at recognising and awarding long and meritorious service of serving civil

² If an awardee has over 15 years of service but less than 20 years of service at the time of receiving the SCS's Commendation Award, the travel award will be granted only when the awardee sustains 20 years of service, provided that the performance of the staff concerned is consistently outstanding before granting of the award.

³ The rate of the travel amount is set with reference to the arrangement of the Long and Meritorious Service Travel Award Scheme, and is granted on a one-off basis and in the form of an accountable travel allowance. A travelling companion can receive the same travel amount.

servants. All local non-directorate officers with a continuous service of 20 years or more and a track record of consistently very good performance are eligible for consideration for the grant of an award. Civil servants may only be awarded once in their civil service career. The award is granted on a reimbursement basis. The awardees can flexibly choose to nominate a travelling companion, and use the granted amount for a single trip, which is \$27,090 per person in the 2025-2026 financial year. The number of awards for each year is determined on the basis of one award for every 27 officers meeting the length of service requirement (i.e. at a ratio of 1:27). In the 2025-2026 financial year, there are about 1 500 award quotas. In most circumstances, the number of eligible officers with consistently very good performance in a B/D would exceed the award quotas, and the departmental management is required to assess the candidates carefully and select the most suitable candidates to receive the awards⁴.

(d) Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme

9. The Civil Service Outstanding Service Award Scheme aims to recognise government departments and teams in providing exemplary services, encourage team spirit and innovation, and promote a people-oriented and “One Government” service culture. Awards include inter-departmental partnership award and departmental team awards. Participating teams have to go through a rigorous adjudication process. Adjudication panels comprise Legislative Councillors, seasoned industry practitioners, representatives from professional bodies, bureaux representatives and staff side members of the Central Consultative Councils. The dedicated efforts and accomplishments of civil servants in serving the public would be adapted into training materials. For example, the Civil Service College has produced case studies on how various departments working in full collaboration to construct over 4 000 temporary quarantine camp units within 10 months during the epidemic. The case demonstrated the “One Government” team spirit and how civil servants proactively communicated with different sectors of the community and stakeholders, while adopting innovative ways in planning and construction to overcome the manpower and time constraints. The tasks were eventually completed ahead of schedule. Winning departments could also share their experiences and insights through seminars. We are currently enhancing various arrangements of the scheme, including simplifying the adjudication mechanism and updating the adjudication criteria such as leveraging on technology to reduce the manpower and time required for departments’ participation in the scheme. A new round of the scheme will be launched following the review.

⁴ Awardees of the Scheme have to use the travel award to make a trip outside Hong Kong within a validity period (i.e. within the financial year of receiving the award or before the pre-retirement leave ends (whichever is the earlier)).

(e) HKSAR Honours and Awards System

10. Civil servants who have made significant contributions at work can be awarded under the honours and awards system of the HKSAR. Many officers have, over the years, received Bauhinia Awards, Bravery Awards, Disciplined Services and ICAC Awards, Medals of Honour and Chief Executive's Commendations. In 2024, a total of 250 civil servants were awarded under this system. Among them, 82 received awards of different kinds and 168 received the Chief Executive's Commendation for Community Service or Government/Public Service. A full list of recipients is published every year. The Chief Executive presents awards to recipients at a ceremony held at the Government House each year.

(f) Commendation Letter Scheme

11. Apart from the above schemes, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments may also issue commendation letters to officers whose performance can meet the prescribed criteria under the Commendation Letter Scheme. Such criteria include: whether the officers have put up outstanding service for at least three consecutive years; or have made significant contribution towards enhancing the efficiency or the image of their B/Ds; or have performed a meritorious or brave act warranting special recognition. Nominations may be made all year round and they are considered by a commendation committee set up by individual B/Ds under the chairmanship of a directorate officer. Same as the practice of the SCS's Commendation Award Scheme, the commendation letter issued will be recorded in the personal file of the recipients. In 2024, a total of about 6 200 commendation letters were issued by all B/Ds.

Publicity Efforts

12. If civil servants are recognised and commended for their outstanding achievements, it will not only maintain their passion for public service, but will also help attract talents to join the civil service. We will continue to enhance our efforts to publicise good stories of civil servants. Following the extensive publicity on the work of the awarded team of the Chief Executive's Award for Exemplary Performance from June to October 2024 in respect of the enactment of legislation on Article 23 of the Basic Law, we further selected 10 good stories among the award recipients of the SCS's Commendation Award Scheme 2024 for the joint production of a television series entitled "United to serve the community - Good stories of civil servants" with RTHK. The television series premiered during the prime time on RTHK TV 31 for 10 consecutive evenings in mid-December 2024 and has

been arranged for repeated broadcast between December 2024 and July 2025. To maximise the publicity effect, the video and its highlight are broadcast during the same period on the display screens at the platforms of about 40 MTR stations (including a number of stations with high passenger flow) and in-train TVs, over 600 government venues, Education and Careers Expo, as well as CSB's social media platforms. In addition, we have arranged for awardees to attend media interviews and to participate in interview programmes at television stations, so as to showcase their achievements and dedication to serving the community.

Other Measures to Encourage and Support Civil Servants

13. We will continue to make full use of the commendation schemes to give recognition to good performance. Moreover, we will also support colleagues by providing training on quality service as well as emotional wellness. CSB has commissioned professional bodies to provide hotline counselling service on stress management to help staff from some 60 B/Ds cope with stress arising from work and other personal problems. The service includes telephone and face-to-face counselling and referral services. Separately, about 10 departments provide dedicated counselling services for their own staff.

14. Furthermore, SCS will visit departments to keep abreast of their latest achievements and the new challenges faced by them, and to exchange views with and give encouragement to frontline staff. We also encourage departmental management to maintain close communication with staff, particularly frontline staff, with a view to promoting mutual understanding and partnership between the two sides and better fostering a sense of belonging among staff.

Awards and Commendations from Outside Organisations

15. Apart from the Government's commendations schemes, government departments receive awards and commendations from outside organisations from time to time. For instance, five government departments respectively received the Award for Public Organisation, the Award on Mediation and the Customer Services Award of the Ombudsman's Awards presented in October 2024, while another 51 government employees from 29 departments were given individual awards. Various government departments also received international awards that demonstrate the recognition of their works. These honours and commendations play an important role in encouraging the awarded teams and colleagues.

Advice Sought

16. Members are invited to note the information in this paper on various civil service commendation schemes and their implementation, and offer comments.

Civil Service Bureau
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