



Lateral Entry in Civil Services

For Prelims: [Union Public Service Commission \(UPSC\)](#), [Other Backward Classes \(OBCs\)](#), [Scheduled Castes \(SCs\)](#), [Scheduled Tribes \(STs\)](#), NITI Aayog, Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC).

For Mains: Issue of Lateral Entry into Bureaucracy, its implications, Issue of Reservation in Higher Posts in Bureaucracy, its implication and Way Forward.

Source: [IE](#)

Why in News?

Recently, the [Union Public Service Commission \(UPSC\)](#) issued a notification for recruiting 45 joint secretaries, directors and deputy secretaries as specialists in government departments through **lateral entry scheme**.

- Due to opposition from several groups who argued that the scheme compromised the reservation rights of [Other Backward Classes \(OBCs\)](#), [SCs](#), and [STs](#), the government decided to withdraw its plan to proceed with recruitment through the Lateral Entry Scheme

What is a Lateral Entry Scheme?

- **About:**
 - Lateral entry refers to the process of **appointing individuals from outside the government** directly to **mid-level and senior** positions.
 - It aims to bring in **domain-specific expertise** and **fresh perspectives** to enhance governance.
 - These '**lateral entrants**' are appointed on contracts for **3 years**, which can be extended to a **maximum of 5 years**.
- **Origin and Implementation:**
 - The concept of lateral entry was first introduced under the 2004-09 and was strongly endorsed by the [Second Administrative Reforms Commission \(ARC\)](#) established in **2005**.
 - It was later recommended by [NITI Aayog](#) in **2017** to bring in expertise and fresh perspectives.
 - In **2017**, **NITI Aayog**, in its **3-year Action Agenda**, and the **Sectoral Group of Secretaries (SGoS) on Governance** recommended the induction of **personnel at middle and senior management levels** in the central government.
- **Eligibility:**
 - Individuals with **domain expertise and a proven track record** in relevant fields from the private sector, state governments, autonomous bodies, or public sector undertakings **are eligible to apply for these positions**.
 - The selection criteria typically **emphasise professional accomplishment** and subject matter expertise.

- **Reservation in Lateral Entry:**
 - Lateral entries have been **excluded from the reservation system** because of the "**13-point roster**" policy.
 - The "13-point roster" policy establishes a **method for determining a candidate's placement** on a list of job openings by calculating their group's quota percentage (SC, ST, OBC, and **EWS**) as a fraction of one hundred.
 - Since each lateral entry position is considered a "**Single Post**," the **reservation system does not apply**, allowing these appointments to be made without following reservation guidelines.
 - In the current round of recruitment, **45 openings have been advertised separately for each department**. If considered as a single group, reservations would apply with specific allocations for SC, ST, OBC, and EWS candidates.
 - However, since the **vacancies are treated as individual posts**, they bypass the reservation policy, effectively excluding reserved categories from these positions.
- **Number of Recruitments So Far:**
 - Since the lateral recruitment process began in 2018, a **total of 63 individuals have been appointed** to various Ministries/Departments.
 - As of August 2023, **57** of these lateral entrants currently hold positions in the central government.

ARC Recommendations on Lateral Entry Scheme

- **First Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) (1966):** It was established under chairmanship of Morarji Desai which focused on **professionalising and reforming training and personnel management within the civil services**.
 - While **it did not specifically** advocate for lateral entry, it **laid the groundwork** for addressing the **need for specialised skills in the bureaucracy**.
- **Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) (2005):** It recommended reforms to improve the Indian administrative system's effectiveness, transparency, and citizen-friendliness.
 - In its **10th Report**, the ARC **emphasized the need for lateral entry into higher government positions** to bring in specialised knowledge and skills not always available within traditional civil services.
 - It **proposed recruiting professionals from the private sector**, academia, and public sector undertakings, creating a **talent pool for short-term** or contractual roles.
 - The **ARC also recommended a transparent, merit-based selection process** and stressed integrating lateral entrants while preserving civil service integrity.

Ensuring Social Justice in the Bureaucracy by Age-Based Recruitment to Fixed Tenure System

- Currently, SC/ST officers make up only **4%** and **4.9%** of top bureaucratic positions (Joint secretaries, directors and deputy secretaries etc).
- There has been a proposal of **replacing age-based retirement** with a **fixed tenure system**, allowing all officers **equal chances to reach senior roles**.
 - Fixed tenure system means having a **fixed tenure system of 35 years for all civil servants (Unreserved, SC,ST, OBCs), regardless of entry age**, to ensure equal opportunities and **focus on merit rather than age**.
 - The current age-based eligibility criteria for the civil services examination **disadvantages SC/ST and PwBD candidates**, as they are **unable to reach top positions** due to **late entry and mandatory retirement before** reaching the top position.
- **Arguments in Favour:**
 - **Increased Representation:** Fixed tenure could help SC/ST and OBC officers reach senior positions, enhancing their representation.
 - **Focus on Merit:** Prioritising competence over age at entry ensures skilled individuals can advance.
 - **Promoting Social Justice:** Aligns with goals for a **more inclusive bureaucracy**.
 - **Feasibility:** Extended working years are **feasible with rising life expectancy** and

regular fitness checks.

▪ **Arguments Against:**

- **Age Concerns:** Extending tenure could lead to **officers serving into their seventies**, potentially requiring age limits to be lowered to **ensure retirement around 67**.
- **Resistance to Change:** The traditional **seniority-based system is deeply entrenched**, and changes could face strong opposition.
- **Political Issues:** Fixed tenure might be seen as **undermining merit-based promotions and could spark debates over age**, experience, and performance.

What are the Arguments in Favour of Lateral Entry Scheme in Civil Services?

- **Specialised Skill and Expertise:** Lateral entry allows the government to **recruit specialists with expertise** in areas like technology, management, and finance, **addressing gaps in knowledge** that generalist civil servants may not have as governance becomes more complex.
- **Innovation and Reforms:** Lateral recruits can bring **valuable experiences from the private sector, NGOs**, or other organisations, helping to **reform and enhance administrative processes** and governance.
- **Filling The Gap:** According to Department of Personnel and Training data, there is a **shortage of about 1500 IAS officers**. Lateral entry can help bridge this deficit.
- **Bringing a Change in Work Culture:** It will help in bringing **change work culture in the Government sector** which is criticised for **red-tapism, rule-book bureaucracy**, and status-quoist.
- **Participatory Governance:** Presently, governance is becoming a **more participatory and multi-actor endeavour** and lateral entry provides stakeholders such as the private sector and non-profits an **opportunity to participate in the governance process**.

What are the Criticisms of Lateral Entry Scheme in Civil Services?

- **Short Tenure:** The Central government has set the tenure for joint secretaries at **3 years**, which is **insufficient for newcomers to fully acclimate to the complex governance systems** and make meaningful contributions.
- **Maintaining Objectivity and Neutrality:** Bringing in individuals from diverse backgrounds can **challenge objectivity and neutrality due to potential conflicts of interest and impartiality concerns**, especially if recruits have prior ties to private companies or interest groups.
- **Impact on Permanent Officers' Morale:** The increasing number of lateral entrants could create a **divide between them and permanent officers**, potentially harming the morale of career bureaucrats.
- **Potential Dilution of Merit-Based Recruitment:** Lateral entry might **dilute the merit-based recruitment system** that underpins the civil services. If not conducted transparently, it could lead to perceptions of **favouritism or nepotism** in the selection process.
- **Outsider Syndrome:** Traditional bureaucrats **may resist lateral entrants due to concerns about hierarchy and disruption**, often treating them as outsiders and displaying hostility towards their inclusion.
- **Experience Requirement for Senior Positions:** In the permanent system, IAS officers are promoted to the joint secretary level **after 17 years of service**, typically around the age of 45, and remain at that level for ten years.
 - If similar experience requirements **are applied to lateral entrants, it may deter the best candidates from joining**, as they often reach the peak of their professions in the private sector at that age.

Way Forward

- **Ensure Transparency:** Maintain a **transparent, merit-based selection process** for lateral entries that **focuses on relevant expertise, experience, and skills, avoiding perceptions of favouritism or bias**.

- In the UK, the **UK Civil Service Fast Stream program** recruits individuals directly into the civil service at multiple levels, focusing on candidates with **specialised skills and expertise**.
- **Training of Lateral Entrants:** An **intensive training program for entrants** from the private sector to civil services needs to be formulated which helps them understand the complex nature of work in Government.
- **Clear Expectations and Role Definition:** Clearly define **roles, responsibilities, and expectations, and establish specific performance indicators** and objectives to align contributions with organisational goals.
- **Relaxing Age Barrier:** To attract top talent, age **requirements for joint secretary positions should be relaxed to include candidates** as young as 35.
 - In the past, economists like **Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Bimal Jalan advanced to senior positions at a younger age**, which was a factor in their return from lucrative international roles.

Conclusion

Lateral entry, like competition in any field, can be beneficial, but it requires careful consideration of entry criteria, job roles, personnel numbers, and training to ensure **it drives positive change**. Additionally, reforms to the **traditional seniority-based system are essential for comprehensive administrative improvements**.

Drishti Mains Question:

What is the Lateral Entry Scheme of the Government into Civil Services? What are its merits and demerits and its implications?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year's Question (PYQs)

Q. "Institutional quality is a crucial driver of economic performance". In this context suggest reforms in the Civil Service for strengthening democracy. (2020)