

3. National Conference of Chairpersons of State Public Service Commissions – Polity

The 2025 national conference of chairpersons of the State Public Service Commissions (PSCs) is being hosted by the Telangana State Public Service Commission on December 19 and 20

Historical Linkages

The origin of Public Service Commissions in India lies in the nationalist demand for merit-based recruitment and an administration insulated from colonial bias. Indian leaders demanded that qualified Indians, not only British officials, should occupy higher civil service posts. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1918) acknowledged this demand and recommended creation of an independent and politically neutral Public Service Commission to oversee recruitment. Based on these recommendations, the first Public Service Commission (known today as UPSC's predecessor) was established in 1926, though its powers remained limited and largely advisory. The Government of India Act, 1935 strengthened the federal structure and extended PSC provisions to provincial governments, enabling formal recruitment structures at subnational levels. After Independence, the Constitution of India (Articles 315–323) institutionalised –

1. Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) at the central level
2. State Public Service Commissions (State PSCs) in every state

This continuity reflects India's commitment to a professional, impartial, and merit-based civil service, integral to democratic governance.

Structure at the Union and State Levels

A. Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) – The UPSC functions in a politically neutral and institutionally secure environment, protected by constitutional safeguards (fixed tenure, removal only via Presidential order after Supreme Court inquiry).

Members are selected based on –

1. Long administrative experience
2. Professional reputation
3. Regional representation
4. A strict expectation of apolitical conduct

The Commission enjoys institutional advantages, such as –

1. A clearly defined, stable manpower requirement across Union ministries and services.
2. Strong financial resources ensuring uninterrupted examination cycles.
3. Support from the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) under the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions (est. 1985).

As a result, UPSC exams follow predictable schedules, maintaining a regular annual calendar, timely notifications, and systematic recruitment.

B. State Public Service Commissions (State PSCs) – State PSCs operate in environments often affected by political influence, with appointments sometimes deviating from ideal eligibility norms. Unlike UPSC, State PSCs face –

1. Unpredictable and irregular manpower assessments, with sporadic indenting from departments.
2. Financial constraints, hindering adoption of updated exam technologies and evaluation systems.
3. Absence of a dedicated personnel ministry, leading to ad hoc exam calendars and chronic delays.

Consequently, many states frequently –

1. Postpone recruitment
2. Extend retirement ages to compensate for vacancies
3. Conduct examinations irregularly, affecting youth employment and governance capacity.

How They Work & Key Operational Issues

A. UPSC's Working System – UPSC sustains its reputation for credibility and fairness due to –

1. Periodic Expert Committees to revise syllabi, ensuring contemporary relevance.
2. A nationwide panel of subject experts for paper-setting, reducing regional bias.
3. Strong moderation and scaling mechanisms that maintain uniformity and fairness across papers.

4. A balanced approach to transparency and confidentiality, which maintains trust while protecting exam integrity.
5. Swift implementation of systemic reforms, such as digitization, time-bound disclosures, and improved evaluation frameworks.

These institutional practices minimise litigation and sustain UPSC as a global benchmark for merit-based recruitment.

B. State PSCs' Working System and Issues – State PSCs often face structural weaknesses such as –

1. Rare syllabus updates, making exams outdated and misaligned with modern administrative needs.
2. Dependence on limited local academic resources, affecting the quality and diversity of paper-setters.
3. Inadequate moderation frameworks, resulting in score inconsistencies.
4. Complex reservation calculations, combined with procedural lapses, leading to frequent court cases.
5. Delays in finalising answer keys, results, and appointments, causing erosion of public trust.

These chronic issues have prompted many aspirants to demand UPSC-conducted recruitment for state services, reflecting declining faith in the state-level mechanisms.

Key Reforms Proposed for Strengthening State PSCs

A. Institutional and Administrative Reforms

Creation of a State-level Personnel Ministry (similar to DoPT) to ensure –

1. Systematic manpower planning
2. Consolidated recruitment notifications
3. A five-year recruitment roadmap, avoiding sudden examination announcements or erratic scheduling.

Constitutional amendments to ensure –

- a. Uniform age limits (55–65 years) for PSC Members
- b. Specified eligibility norms, such as –
 - i. Former senior civil servants for official positions
 - ii. Professionals with 10+ years of experience for non-official positions
- c. Mandatory consultation with the Opposition leader to ensure bipartisan credibility.

B. Examination Reforms

Regular syllabus revision, aligned broadly with UPSC to maintain national standards while permitting state-specific components. Adoption of public consultations during syllabus updates, ensuring transparency and relevance. Introduction of mixed exam formats (objective + descriptive) to improve evaluation quality. Emphasis on –

1. Accurate question translation
2. Inclusion of state-specific history, geography, and economy
3. Integrity safeguards against AI-enabled malpractice, including algorithmic monitoring and biometric authentication.

Strengthening of evaluation processes through –

1. Professional moderation panels
2. Digital evaluation systems
3. Cross-state peer review mechanisms.

C. Administrative Strengthening – Appointment of a senior IAS officer as Secretary for improved supervision, coordination, and compliance. Clear separation between PSC autonomy and executive interference, ensuring independence while enabling accountability.

D. Transparency–Confidentiality Balance – Adoption of a UPSC-like calibrated transparency model –

1. Disclosure of answer keys, cut-offs, and merit lists at appropriate stages
2. Confidentiality of evaluators, paper-setters, and moderation methods
3. Time-bound resolution of disputes and objections

These reforms aim to build a vibrant, credible, efficient recruitment ecosystem, enabling State PSCs to match UPSC's standards.

Source – <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/how-can-state-pscs-be-reformed-explained/article70314087.ece>