

The Assam Engineering (Irrigation Department) Service Rules, 1978

ASSAM

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Rule

THE-ASSAM-ENGINEERING-IRRIGATION-DEPARTMENT-SERVICE-RULES of 1978

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The Assam Engineering (Irrigation Department) Service Rules, 1978Last Updated 12th February, 2020

1. Title and commencement.

(1)These rules shall be called The Assam Engineering (Irrigation Department) Service Rules, 1978.(2)They shall take effect from the date of this Notification.(3)These rules shall be applicable to the members of the service appointed either before or after promulgation of these rules.

2. Definitions.

- In these rules, unless there is anything repugnant in the subject or context-(a)'Appointing Authority' means the Governor of Assam ;(b)'Board' means the Selection Board constituted under Rule 15 ;(c)'Commission' means the Assam Public Service Commission ;(d)'Government' means the Government of Assam ;(e)'Governor' means the Governor of Assam ;(f)'Member' means a member of the Assam Engineering (Irrigation Department) Service;(g)'Select list' means the list as referred to in Rule 6(1)(d) and the lists finally approved by the Appointing Authority under Rule 13(6) and by the Commission under Rule 14(2);(h)'Service' means the Assam Engineering (Irrigation Department) Service; and(i)'Year' means a calendar year.

3. Class, cadre, branch and status.

(1)The service shall consist of the following classes and cadres : (a)Class I (Senior Grade) : It shall include the cadres-(i)Secretary to Government,(ii)Chief Engineer,(iii)Additional Chief Engineer, and(iv)Superintending Engineer.(b)Class I : It shall include the cadres-(i)Executive Engineer,(ii)Research Officer, Research Station, and(iii)Assistant Executive Engineer.Officers in cadres (i) and (ii) shall have the same status.(c)Class II : It shall include the cadre-(i)Assistant Engineer.(2)The service may also include-(a)any post equivalent to a post in any of the cadres mentioned in sub-rule (1); and(b)any cadre or post subsequently laid down by Government to be included in a cadre of service.Explanation. - (i) The posts of Director, Design/Planning, Deputy Chief Engineer and Chief Research Officer are included in the cadre of Superintending Engineer.(ii)The post of Assistant Chief Engineer and Additional Executive Engineer are included in the cadre of Executive Engineer.(iii)The posts of Assistant Research Officer are included in the cadre of Assistant Engineer.(3)The cadres of Additional Chief Engineers, Superintending Engineers, Executive Engineers and Assistant Engineers may have distinct Branches namely, Civil, Mechanical and Electrical and each Branch may be deemed to be a separate cadre.(4)The posts in cadres (i), (ii) and (iii) of Class I (Senior Grade) mentioned in sub-rule (1) shall be borne in the civil branch unless specifically created for any other branch, as may be considered necessary.

4. Strength of the service.

- The strength of each cadre in a class of the service shall be such as determined by the Governor from time to time. The strength of the cadres of the service on the date of commencement of these rules shall be as shown in Schedule I:Provided that the Governor may hold in abeyance any post as and when considered necessary.

5. Method of recruitment.

(1)Recruitment of Class II of the service shall be made-(a)by direct recruitment on the basis of selection made in accordance with Rule 6 ; and(b)by promotion in accordance with Rules 11, 13 and 14.(2)Recruitment to Class I and Class I (Senior Grade) shall be made by promotion only in accordance with Rules 12 and 13.

6. Direct recruitment.

(1)Subject to sub-rule (3) of Rule 11, direct recruitment to cadres of Assistant Engineers shall be made by the Governor on the basis of selection made by the Commission in accordance with the procedures hereinafter provided : (a)Before the end of each year the Government shall make an assessment regarding the likely number of vacancies to be filled by direct recruitment during the next year and shall intimate the same to the Commission together with the details about reservation for candidates belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or any other category as laid down by Government as provided under Rule 17 and about carry forward of such reservation.(b)The Government shall simultaneously request the Commission to recommend a list of candidates for

direct recruitment, in order of performance.(c)The Commission shall make the selection in accordance with the scheme of selection prescribed by the Government in consultation with the Commission. The Commission may hold such test or interview and undertake scrutiny of published article or thesis of the candidate, if any, and the certificates and other documents, as may be considered necessary.(d)The Commission shall furnish Government with a list of candidates recommended by it in order of preference, found suitable for direct recruitment. The number of candidates in such a list may be approximately double the number of vacancies.(e)The Commission shall simultaneously publish the list in the Assam Gazette and at such other place as the Commission may consider proper.(2)The list mentioned in Clause (d) and (e) of sub-rule (1) of this rule shall remain valid for 12 calendar months from the date of recommendation.(3)In the event of the Commission being unable to recommend sufficient number of candidates to fill up the vacancies in a year, it shall, in consultation with the Appointing Authority, repeat the procedure as mentioned hereinbefore under sub-rule (1) of this rule, for recommending a subsequent list in the year :Provided that the Appointing Authority shall not make appointment of any candidate from the subsequent select list until all the candidates of the earlier list of the same year, eligible for appointment, have been offered the appointment.

Qualification for direct recruitment

7. Age.

- A candidate shall not be less than 21 years and more than 30 years of age on the First January of the year of recruitment, with relaxation in case of candidates belonging to special categories like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or any other category as laid down by Government in accordance with the general orders of the Government in force.

8. Academic qualification.

- The academic qualifications of a candidate for direct requirement shall be as prescribed by the Government from time to time. The qualifications and experience prescribed as on the date of these rules coming into force are given in Schedule II.

9. Physical fitness.

- A candidate for direct recruitment shall be, -(1)of sound health, both mentally and physically and free from organic defect or bodily infirmity likely to interfere with the efficient performance of his duties ; and(2)required to undergo medical examination before appointment to the service.

10. Character.

- A candidate for direct recruitment shall produce to the Commission, certificates of good character from, -(a)the principal Academic Officer of the University or College in which he studied last; and(b)two respectable persons, who are well acquainted with (but not related to) the candidate.

11. Promotion as Assistant Engineer.

(1)The Appointing Authority shall publish in the Government Gazette annually the number of vacancies in the respective cadres of Assistant Engineers which have occurred or are likely to occur in the year.(2)Subject to suitability as may be decided by the Board and by the Appointing Authority in consultation with the Commission, an officer belonging to the corresponding cadre of Subordinate Engineer Grade I in the Assam Subordinate Engineering (Irrigation Department) Service under the Government and possessing the qualifications as set forth herein below shall be promoted to the cadre of Assistant Engineers in the manner provided in Rules 13 and 14.(3)The vacancies to be filled up by promotion of Subordinate Engineers shall be so fixed that the promoted Assistant Engineers do not exceed 30% of the total corresponding cadre strength of permanent and temporary Assistant Engineers.(4)A member of the Assam Subordinate Engineering Grade I (Irrigation Department) Service shall be eligible for promotion as Assistant Engineer subject to the following conditions :(a)He has rendered minimum 8 years of service as a subordinate Engineer on the First January of the year of promotion.(b)He has successfully undergone the training and passed the Departmental Examination as prescribed by Government from time to time.(5)Notwithstanding anything contained hereinbefore in this rule, subject to suitability, a Subordinate Engineer Grade I, of the Assam Subordinate Engineering (Irrigation Department) Service, on his acquiring the academic qualification, as prescribed for a direct recruit Assistant Engineer shall be promoted as Assistant Engineer, in consultation with the Commission, as provided in Rule 14, against the next available vacancy in the cadre and such promotion shall be treated as direct recruitment to the cadre of Assistant Engineer for the purpose of these rules.

12. Promotion.

(1)All vacancies in Class I cadres shall be filled by promotion :Provided that the Governor may, for good and sufficient reasons, fill up any of the vacancies in Class I (Senior Grade) for specialised investigation, design and research work on a purely temporary basis either on tenure or by transfer on deputation of officers from outside the service or in any other cadre for any specialised work, by inter-departmental lateral transfer on a purely temporary, basis, of officers among Public Work, Irrigation and Flood Control Departments, subject to the following conditions :(i)The Governor is satisfied that there is no suitable officer available in the service for filling the vacancy ;(ii)The specialisation needs of the department are adequately ensured by the arrangement;(iii)The officer so taken to a department shall not have any claim for any promotion in that department; and(iv)In case the Governor is satisfied that the Officer so taken to a department for a specialized work cannot be withdrawn from the work due to non-availability of any other officer of an equivalent status in the department for that work. The officer so taken to a department shall be granted all promotions proforma, whatsoever may be due to him in respect of his original service.(2)Subject to suitability as may be decided by the Board and by the Appointing Authority as set forth in Rule 13 and also subject to possessing such qualification and experience as may be prescribed by the Governor, from time to time, a member shall be eligible for promotion to the corresponding higher cadre in the manner hereinafter provided. The qualifications and experience prescribed as on the date of commencement of these rules are furnished in sub-rules (3) and (4) of this rule and also in Schedule III :(i)From Assistant Engineer to Assistant Executive Engineer.(ii)From Assistant Engineer and

Assistant Executive Engineer to Executive Engineer.(iii)From Assistant Research Officer, Research Station to Research Officer, Research Station.(iv)From Executive Engineer to Superintending Engineer.(v)From Superintending Engineer to Additional Chief Engineer.(vi)From Additional Chief Engineer to Chief Engineer.(vii)From Chief Engineer to Secretary :Provided that 14 per cent of the number of posts of Executive Engineer, as on 1st January, 1973 and thereafter 20 per cent of the number of vacancies occurring in a year in the cadre of Executive Engineer, shall be reserved for being filled up by promotion of S.E.S., Sub-divisional Officers/Sub-divisional Officers (T.C) encadred as Assistant Engineers :Provided further that there shall not be any such reservation when all the Sub-divisional Officers/Sub-divisional Officers (T.C.) mentioned in Rule 22(4) are adjusted.(3)For promotion from one cadre to another of the service, an officers shall be eligible, if:-(a)he has rendered minimum continuous service, on the 1st January of the year of promotion :-

In Cadre of	For a period of	For the purposes of his promotion to the cadre of
(1)	(2)	(3)
(i) Assistant Engineer	5 years	Assistant Executive Engineer.
(ii) Assistant Executive Engineer	5 years	Executive Engineer

(b)he has successfully undergone the training and has passed the departmental examination as may be laid down by the Government from time to time.(4)For promotion from Executive Engineer to Superintending Engineer and for further promotion an officer shall have the academic prescribed qualification as in the rule for a direct recruit Assistant Engineer.

13. General procedure for promotion.

(1)Before the end of each year the Government shall make an assessment of the likely number of vacancies to be filled up by promotion in the next year in each cadre.(2)The Appointing Authority shall then furnish to the Board the following documents and information with regard to as many officers in order of seniority as four times the number of vacancies, as assessed under sub-rule (1):(a)information about the number of vacancies;(b)list of officers in order of seniority, eligible for promotion (separate lists for promotion to different cadres shall be furnished) indicating the cadre to which the case of promotion is to be considered;(c)character rolls and personal files of the officers listed together with all papers showing that any adverse remark recorded in the character rolls has been duly communicated to the person concerned and any representation against such adverse remarks has been disposed of after due consideration;(d)details about reservation in case of promotion to Class II of the service and about carry forward of vacancies as provided under sub-rule (3) of Rule 11; and(e)any other documents and information as may be considered necessary by the Appointing Authority or required by the Board.(3)The Appointing Authority shall simultaneously request the Board to recommend within one month a list of officers, found suitable for promotion in order of preference, in respect of promotion to each of the cadres in which recruitment is to be made by promotion.(4)Promotion shall be on the basis of merit with due regard to seniority in all cadres or posts.(5)The Board, after examination of the documents and information furnished the Appointing Authority, shall recommend the Appointing Authority a list of officers about double the probable number of vacancies, in order of preference, found suitable for promotion. In case the

Board does not consider an officer suitable for promotion according to seniority, it shall record the reasons thereof in writing and forward these reasons to the Appointing Authority together with the list.(6)The Appointing authority shall consider the list prepared by the Board alongwith character rolls and personal files of the employees and approve the list unless it considers any change necessary. If the Appointing Authority considers it necessary to make any change in the list received from the Board, he shall inform the Board of the changes proposed and after taking into account the comments, if any, of the Board, may approve the list filially with such modifications, if, any, as may, in his opinion, be just and proper :Provided that it shall not be necessary for the Appointing Authority to consider the list submitted by the Board recommending candidate for promotion under Rule 11. This list shall be forwarded by the Appointing Authority to the Commission, as provided under Rule 14(1).(7)The inclusion of a candidate's name in a select list shall confer no right to promotion unless the Appointing Authority is satisfied after such enquiry, as may be considered necessary, that a candidate is suitable for promotion.(8)The select lists shall remain valid for 12 months from the date of approval by the Commission in case of Assistant Engineers and for 12 months from the date of approval by the Board in other cases.(9)The promotions shall be in accordance with the list finally approved by the Appointing Authority or by the Commission, as the case may be.

14. Special procedure for promotion as Assistant Engineer.

(1)On receipt of the list for the posts of Assistant Engineer from the Board, the Appointing Authority shall forward it to the Commission together with the information and documents as referred to in sub-rule (2) of Rule 13 with a request to approve the list.(2)The Commission shall consider the list recommended by the Board together with the information and documents and such other documents and information as may be required by the Commission and obtained from the Appointing Authority. The Commission shall finally approve the list with such modification as it consider just and proper.(3)The select list as finally approved shall be published by the Appointing Authority in the Assam Gazette within 15 days from the date of approval.

15. Selection Board.

- The Boards as referred to in Rules 11, 12 and 13 shall consist of the following :(1)The Board for promotion to the post of Secretary :

- (i) Chief SecretaryChairman
- (ii) Commissioner, as nominated by Chief SecretaryMember.
- (iii) Secretary, P.W.D.Member-Secretary.

(2)Board for promotion to the posts of Chief Engineer and Additional Chief Engineer :

- (i) Chief SecretaryChairman
- (ii) Secretary, P.W.D.Member.
- (iii) Secretary, IrrigationMember.
- (iv) Secretary, Flood ControlMember-Secretary.

(3) Board for promotion from Superintending Engineer, Executive Engineer and Assistant Executive Engineer :

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------|
| (i) Secretary, Irrigation |Chairman and Secretary |
| (ii) Secretary, Flood Control |Member |
| (iii) Chief Engineer, Irrigation |Member |
| (iv) Representative of the Department of Personnel and A.R. not below the rank of Deputy Secretary, nominated by the Secretary, P. and A.R. |Member |

(4) Selection Board for promotion from Subordinate Engineers to Assistant Engineers :

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| (i) Chairman or Member, Assam Public Service Commission, nominated by its Chairman |Chairman |
| (ii) Secretary, Irrigation |Member |
| (iii) A representative of Personnel and A.R. Department, nominated by the Secretary, P. and A.R. |Member |
| (iv) Chief Engineer, Irrigation |Member-Secretary |

16. Disqualification.

(1) No person shall be eligible for appointment to the service-(a) unless he is a citizen of India, and (b) if he has more than one wife living or in case of a female candidate who has married a person who has one wife living : Provided that the Governor may, if he is satisfied that there are special grounds for doing so, exempt any person from the operation of this clause. (2) No person who attempts to enlist support for his candidature directly or indirectly by any recommendation either written or oral or by any other means, shall be appointed to the service.

17. Reservation.

- In the case of direct recruitment to the service there shall be reservation in favour of candidates belonging to special categories like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes or any other category as laid down by Government in accordance with the general orders of the Government in force.

18. Appointment.

(1) Subject to the provisions of Rule 17 and sub-rule (2) of this rule appointment under Rule 6 shall be made by the Governor in accordance with the order of preference determined in the list referred to in Clause (d) of sub-rule (1) of Rule 6. (2) The inclusion of candidate's name in the list mentioned in Clause (d) of sub-rule (1) of Rule 6 shall confer no right to appointment unless the Appointing Authority is satisfied after such enquiry as prescribed by the Government from time to time and also, as may be considered necessary that a candidate is suitable in all respects for appointment to the service.

19. Joining time.

- A person shall join within 15 days from the date of receipt of the order of appointment or of promotion, failing which the appointment shall be cancelled unless the Appointing Authority extends the period which shall not, in all, exceed three months.

20. Training.

- A member of the service may be required to undergo such training and pass such departmental examination as the Government may prescribe from time to time.

21. Discharge or reversion.

- A temporary or officiating member shall be liable to be discharged or reverted to the lower cadre of the service or to his original service, if-(1)he fails to make sufficient use of the opportunities given during any training as may be prescribed by the Government from time to time or fails to render satisfactory service during his tenure of service in the cadre; and(2)it is found on a subsequent verification that he was initially not qualified for the appointment or that he had furnished any incorrect information with regard to his appointment.

22. Seniority.

(1)The seniority of a member in a cadre appointed by direct recruitment or by promotion shall be determined according to the order of reference in the respective list finally approved by the Appointing Authority-under sub-rule (6) of Rule 13 and sub-rule (3) of Rule 14, sub-rule (1) of Rule 18, if he joins the appointment within 15 days from the date of receipt of the order or within the extended period as mentioned in Rule 19.(2)If a member fails to join the appointment within the initial 15 days from receipt of the order or within the extended period, as mentioned in Rule 19, but joins later, his seniority shall be determined in accordance with the date of joining.(3)A member appointed by promotion against a vacancy occurring in a year shall be senior to a member appointed by direct recruitment of that year.(4)A separate seniority list of S.E.S. Sub-divisional Officers and Sub-divisional Officers (T.C.) encadred as Assistant Engineers with effect from 1st January, 1973, promoted from the cadre of erstwhile Subordinate Engineer, Grade I, shall be maintained. Such a seniority list shall continue till all the members of the list are adjusted against a promotion post or the posts are vacated by retirement or otherwise.(5)The inter se seniority of such Sub-divisional Officers and sub-divisional Officers (T.C.) shall be fixed in accordance with sub-rule (1) of this rule.(6)The seniority of such Sub-divisional Officers and Sub-divisional Officers (T.C.), vis-a-vis, the direct recruit Assistant Engineer shall be in accordance with the detailed instructions issued by the Government.

23. Probation and confirmation.

(1) Subject to availability of a permanent vacancy in the respective cadre, a member shall be placed according to seniority on probation against the permanent vacancy for a period of two years before he is confirmed against the permanent vacancy: Provided that the period of probation may for good and sufficient reasons be extended by the Appointing Authority for any specified period not exceeding a period of two years: Provided further that the period of probation may be curtailed or dispensed with in any case for good and sufficient reasons by the Appointing Authority. (2) A member of the service placed on probation under sub-rule (1) shall be confirmed against the permanent vacancy subject to the following conditions: (a) He has completed the period of probation to the satisfaction of the Appointing Authority in accordance with sub-rule (1). (b) He has successfully undergone the training and passed the departmental examination, if any, prescribed by Government under Rule 20. (3) If confirmation of a member is delayed on account of his failure to qualify for such confirmation, he shall lose his position in order of seniority vis-a-vis such of his juniors as might be confirmed earlier than him. His seniority shall, however, be resorted on his confirmation subsequently.

24. Gradation list.

- There shall be prepared and published every year a gradation list containing the names of all members of the service cadre-wise, in order of seniority and such other particulars as date of birth date of appointment, etc.

25. Pay.

- All appointments in the service shall be made in the time-scale of pay as may be prescribed by the Government from time to time. The scales of pay of the posts in the cadres of the service, on the date of commencement of these rules, are as shown in Schedule I.

26. Mode of employment.

(1) Members of the service shall be employed in such manner as the Appointing Authority may decide, subject to the condition that a member belonging to a particular branch of the cadre shall be employed within the same branch. (2) A member of the service shall be liable to be posted anywhere within the State of Assam or outside Assam, or any other department of the Government, a body corporate in the affairs of which the Government may be substantially interested, or an Autonomous District Council, if so required in the interest of public service and in such case the member shall not have any option against such posting or transfer. (3) A member of the service, possessing a degree in Civil/Mechanical/Electrical/Telecommunication/Electronic Engineering shall, if so required, be liable to serve in any defence service or posts connected with the defence of India, for a period of not less than 4 years including the period spent on training, if any: Provided that such person- (a) shall not be required to serve as aforesaid after the expiry of 10 years from the date of appointment; (b) shall not ordinarily be required to serve as aforesaid after attaining the age of 40

years.

27. Other conditions of service.

(1) Except as provided in these rules all matters relating to pay and allowances, leave, pension discipline and other conditions of service shall be regulated by the general rules and/or orders of the Government, for the time being in force. (2) The conditions of service of the members, in respect of matters, for which no provision has been made in these rules, shall be the same as are, for the time being, applicable to other officers of the Government of the corresponding status and having similar functions.

28. Relaxation.

- Where the Appointing Authority is satisfied that the operation of any of these rules causes undue hardship in any particular case, it may dispense with or relax the requirement of that rule to such extent and subject to such conditions as it may consider necessary for dealing with the case in a just and equitable manner: Provided that the case of any person shall not be dealt with in any manner less favourable to him than that provided in any of these rules.

29. Interpretation.

- If any question arises relating to the interpretation of these rules, the decision of the Government shall be final. 4

30. Repeal and savings.

- The rules corresponding to these rules and in force immediately before the commencement of these rules, are hereby repealed : Provided that all orders made or action taken under the rules so repealed or under any general orders ancillary thereto shall be deemed to have been validly made or taken under the corresponding provisions of these rules.

I

[Rules 4 and 25] Sanctioned strength and scales of pay

Sl. No.	Category of posts	Scales of pay	Number of posts		
Permanent	Temporary	Total			
1	2	3	4	5	6
Irrigation Department Civil Branch :					

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1.	Secretary	1600-60-1840-EB-65-2100	1	1	
2.	Chief Engineer	1600-60-1840-EB-65-2100	1	3	4
3.	Superintending Engineer and Deputy Secretary	1200-55-1365-EB-60-1750	2	21	23
4.	Executive Engineer and Under-Secretary	900-55-1285-EB-60-1525	11	49	60
5.	Assistant Ex-Engineer	-	-	-	-
6.	Sub-divisional Officer	500-35-745-EB-35-1025-EB-40-1225 + Spl. pay Rs. 50	12	134	146
7.	Assistant Engineer	500-35-745-EB-35-1025-EB-40-1225	51	392	443
8.	Sub-divisional Officer [SES, SDO/SDO(TC)]	500-35-745-EB-35-1025-EB-40-1225	15	17	32
Mechanical Engineer					
1.	Addl. Chief Engineer	1400-60-1640-EB-65-1900		1	1
2.	Superintending Engineer	1200-55-1365-EB-60-1725		1	1
3.	Executive Engineer	900-55-1285-EB-60-1525	1	5	6
4.	Asst. Executive Engineer	-	-	-	-
5.	Sub-divisional Officer [SES, SDO/SDO(TC)]	500-35-745-EB-35-1025-EB-40-1225 + Special pay Rs. 50	3	12	15
6.	Assistant Engineer	500-35-745-EB-35-1025-EB-40-1225	5	35	40
7.	Sub-divisional Officer [SES, SDO/SDO(TC)]	500-35-745-EB-35-1025-EB-40-1225		4	4
Electrical Branch-					
1.	Assistant Engineer	500-35-745-EB-35-1025-EB-40-1225		36	36

N.B. - There are 4 posts of Chief Engineers out of which 3 posts of Addl. Chief Engineers were temporarily created in lieu of 3 temporary posts of Chief Engineers, which are kept in abeyance. Note

1. - Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Under-Secretary will get special pay as admissible to other Secretaries and A.C.S.I., Deputy Secretaries and Under-Secretaries. Note 2. - The existing cadres of S.D.O. [S.E.S., S.D.O. and S.D.O. (T.C.)] will be merged into the cadre of Assistant Engineers with effect from 1st January, 1973. Note 3. - Special pay @ 20 per cent of the basic pay subject to a maximum of Rs. 200 will be given to all officers when posted to Technical (drawing) and design branches.

II

[Rule 8]Academic qualifications prescribed for direct recruitment to the cadres of Assistant EngineerA candidate for direct recruitment to the cadre of Assistant Engineer must possess a degree in the respective branch of Engineering namely, Civil, Mechanical and Electrical of an Indian or Foreign University recognised by the Government.OrA candidate having passed Parts A and B of the Associate Membership Examination of the Institution of Engineers (India) and possessing a certificate to that effect from the Institution of Engineers (India) will also be educationally qualified for the direct recruitment as Assistant Engineer.

III

[Rule 12(2)]Qualifications for promotion posts

- 1. A candidate for promotion to the cadre of Research Officer in the Research Station, must possess a Class I degree in Civil Engineering.**
- 2. He must have undergone the training in the Research Station successfully.**
- 3. He must have an aptitude for the Research work.**