

ESSAY QUESTION

"Where would you like your career to go after your Chevening Scholarship? How will your chosen master's degree help you fulfil your career plan?"

Word Limit: 500 words — enforced by portal

Sample Essay 1

Shahzad Mirza | Pakistan | Digital Governance Analyst, National Database and Registration Authority | 500 words

For the past four years, I have worked at Pakistan's National Database and Registration Authority — the institution responsible for Pakistan's 130-million-person Computerised National Identity Card system and the digital infrastructure built on it. I have spent those four years watching the CNIC ecosystem become the foundation for an expanding set of algorithmic decisions — automated benefit eligibility, credit scoring, insurance assessment, criminal records screening — without any governing framework for how those decisions are made, challenged, or audited. Pakistan has digital identity infrastructure that many developed countries envy. It has no law, no regulator, and no published standard governing what is done with the data that infrastructure generates. That is the gap I intend to spend my career closing.

By 2034, I want to be directing the Pakistan Digital Governance Commission — a regulatory body I intend to help design and establish that would govern both the technical standards of Pakistan's digital public infrastructure and the legal framework for algorithmic decision-making in public administration. This does not exist yet. It needs to. Pakistan's Federal Cabinet approved a Draft Personal Data Protection Bill in 2023 that has not been enacted. The technical community that would implement its requirements is working without regulatory guidance. The legal community that would litigate its violations has no precedent. I am positioned at the intersection of all three — technical, legal, and administrative — by virtue of my NADRA role. What I lack is the international comparative framework that would allow me to translate existing regulatory models into something that works in Pakistan's institutional context.

The MSc in Digital Policy at University College London fills that gap specifically. UCL's module on Comparative Digital Regulation covers the EU's GDPR implementation, the UK's ICO enforcement framework, and India's Personal Data Protection Act — three models directly relevant to Pakistan's situation, each representing a different approach to the same governance problem. The module on Algorithmic Accountability gives me the technical vocabulary to evaluate AI systems from a regulatory perspective, which my current NADRA role requires me to do without that vocabulary. Returning to Pakistan after my Chevening year, I will rejoin NADRA with a mandate I have already discussed with the Deputy Director General: leading the technical secretariat of a working group convened by the Ministry of IT to draft the implementing regulations under the Data Protection Bill. That working group is the first institutional step toward the Commission I want to build. The Chevening year at UCL is the step before that.

Why this essay is competitive:

- ◆ Opens with current role's specific institutional context — NADRA, 130 million CNICs — not generic 'I work in government'
- ◆ Ten-year destination is named and specific: Pakistan Digital Governance Commission, with a credible reason it needs to exist
- ◆ The gap analysis is precise: three communities (technical, legal, administrative) without coordination
- ◆ UCL programme connection is module-specific: Comparative Digital Regulation, Algorithmic Accountability
- ◆ Return plan is concrete: working group mandate already discussed with named seniority level

Sample Essay 2

Hana Tesfaye | Ethiopia | Agricultural Finance Programme Coordinator, Ethiopian Development Bank | 503 words

I have spent three years trying to do something that should be straightforward: help Ethiopian smallholder farmers access formal credit markets. In practice, what this means is spending most of my working hours navigating the gap between the risk models that Ethiopian banks use — built for collateralized urban lending and systematically misapplying those assumptions to agricultural contexts — and the actual risk profile of smallholder farmers, which is characterised by predictable seasonal cash flow, strong community-level social accountability, and high repayment rates on informal credit that formal institutions refuse to recognise as creditworthiness evidence. The gap costs Ethiopian farmers billions of birr in denied credit annually. It costs the Ethiopian economy in suppressed agricultural productivity. And it persists not because the data to close it does not exist, but because no institution is currently responsible for translating that data into formal credit assessment frameworks.

By 2033, I intend to establish the Ethiopian Smallholder Finance Bureau — a public institution sitting within the National Bank of Ethiopia with a mandate to develop, test, and promulgate alternative credit assessment standards for agricultural lending. The Bureau does not exist. Creating it will require navigating institutional politics within the National Bank, building the technical case for alternative credit models using the farmer data my current role has accumulated, and finding international precedents for regulatory recognition of non-collateral creditworthiness — of which several exist in East Asian and Latin American contexts but have not been systematically translated into the East African regulatory environment. The Master's in Development Finance at SOAS University of London is where I will build the technical foundation to do this.

SOAS's module on Financial Systems in Developing Economies directly covers the microfinance to formal finance transition — the terrain I am trying to build regulatory bridges across. The module on Agricultural Finance and Risk is one of only two postgraduate-level courses in the UK that treats agricultural lending as a distinct financial discipline rather than a subcategory of rural development aid. Professor Machiko Nissanke's research on smallholder financial inclusion, which SOAS hosts, is the only academic body of work I have found that engages directly with East African data in a regulatory rather than philanthropic frame. Returning home after my Chevening year, I will present my research to the National Bank's Financial Inclusion Directorate — a relationship I have already built through my development bank role — and use it as the basis for a regulatory innovation proposal. The Bureau I intend to build starts there.

Why this essay is competitive:

- ◆ Opens with a concrete systemic problem, not a personal aspiration — immediately credible
- ◆ The gap is named precisely: risk models built for collateralised urban lending misapplied to agriculture
- ◆ Ten-year destination is a named institution with a specific mandate — not a 'senior leadership role'
- ◆ SOAS connection names two specific modules AND a specific professor with East African research focus
- ◆ Institutional return pathway is named: National Bank Financial Inclusion Directorate, existing relationship

Sample Essay 3

Putri Rahayu | Indonesia | Water and Sanitation Engineer, Ministry of Public Works and Housing | 498 words

Indonesia has 78 million people without access to safely managed drinking water. I have spent five years as an engineer in the Ministry of Public Works and Housing designing the infrastructure systems that are supposed to serve them — and I have spent most of those five years understanding why the infrastructure often fails not at the engineering level, but at the governance level. Physical water infrastructure in Indonesia is built effectively. The problem is the layer above it: the national framework for prioritising which communities receive what infrastructure,

in what sequence, financed by which mechanism, maintained by which institution. That framework does not exist in any coherent form. Different regions implement entirely different models, with no national evaluation of which models work and no mechanism for transferring lessons between them. My ten-year career goal is to build that framework.

By 2033, I intend to be directing the National Rural WASH Infrastructure Coordination Programme — a function within the Directorate General of Human Settlements that currently exists only as a fragmented set of coordination meetings with no permanent secretariat, no comparative evaluation mandate, and no budget for cross-regional learning. I have spent two years arguing internally for its formalisation. I know what it needs to become. What I need is the policy design expertise, the international precedent, and the institutional credibility that a UK postgraduate qualification gives me within Indonesia's civil service hierarchy — in which a Master's from a recognised UK university carries weight with senior officials in a way that purely technical qualifications do not.

The MSc in Infrastructure Planning and Management at UCL directly serves this need. The module on Infrastructure Governance covers regulatory frameworks for national infrastructure programmes in both OECD and middle-income country contexts — the gap between which is precisely where Indonesia's rural WASH coordination problem sits. The module on Infrastructure Finance and Investment gives me the vocabulary to engage with the World Bank and ADB funding mechanisms that will finance any serious national WASH programme. Cranfield University's MSc in Water and Wastewater Engineering, my second choice, offers deeper technical depth on water system design that would strengthen my internal credibility within the Ministry's engineering divisions — a political consideration that matters in a technical ministry. Returning to Indonesia after my Chevening year, I will bring both the policy framework and the professional credibility to take the Coordination Programme proposal from internal advocacy to institutional reality.

Why this essay is competitive:

- ◆ Opens with a striking statistic (78 million) grounded immediately in personal professional experience
- ◆ Problem is layered and specific: not 'poor water access' but the governance gap above working infrastructure
- ◆ Ten-year destination names the specific existing function and its current weaknesses (no secretariat, no mandate)
- ◆ UCL module connection is career-specific: Infrastructure Governance covers exactly the OECD/middle-income gap
- ◆ Candid about institutional politics: 'UK Master's carries weight with senior officials' — honest and credible