



— FREE RESOURCE · GUIDE 4 OF 5

Essay 3 – Course Choice

Connecting your capability gap to a specific course, university and UK priority area, without ever naming a ranking.

ABOUT THE EXAMPLES.

All universities, professors, modules, institutions and statistics below are anonymised and reinvented versions of successful essays, changed to show technique. Yours must be real, current and verifiable.

THE LIVE QUESTION (2026).

Explain your first choice of course and university only. Please relate your answer to one of the UK priority areas for Chevening:

- What is the specific priority area you wish to address?
- How will your chosen course equip you to address this theme in your home country?
- Why have you selected your particular university in the UK?
- How do you plan to immediately apply the knowledge or skills you will gain after your studies?

WORD LIMIT:

Minimum 100 / Maximum 300 words.

WHAT IS BEING SCORED.

Chevening's criteria are explicit. Show you have researched your three chosen courses, then focus your answer only on your first choice, explaining how it connects to your background, aspirations and intended impact, and describe how specific modules will equip you.

THE ARGUMENT IN FIVE STEPS.

What I already know, then what I lack, then why that gap matters, then why this specific course closes it, then how I will apply the capability. Every sentence belongs to one of those five.

WORD PLAN AT 300 WORDS.

Problem and priority area 70, course and modules 110, university and faculty 60, immediate application 60.

Part one: the priority area

Name one, in Chevening's exact wording:

- Promoting growth and prosperity
- Building resilience in a climate-vulnerable world
- Strengthening security and stability in a volatile world

- Supporting development for more inclusive and effective societies

Say it in a full sentence. It costs eight words and guarantees the assessor can award the mark without interpreting you.

Most work fits two or three areas depending on framing, so pick where your evidence is strongest rather than what sounds most urgent. Having chosen, stay inside it. An essay gesturing at three areas has chosen none.

Part two: the capability gap is the hinge

Everything turns on one sentence. Write it out before drafting anything else.

"My experience has equipped me to do X, but I currently lack Y, which limits my ability to achieve Z."

On X, your existing capability. One clause, not a paragraph, and only the part that makes the gap credible. The reader needs to think "this applicant already has that capability", which is what makes the missing one worth funding. This is not the place to reproduce your CV.

On Y, the gap. Technical expertise, evaluation design, research methodology, data analysis, policy analysis, regulatory drafting, financial modelling, programme management, environmental assessment, digital transformation, or the ability to work across two disciplines your role keeps forcing together. Name it precisely enough that a named module could plausibly fix it.

On Z, why it matters. Answer at the level of your institution, sector or country rather than your career. "It would help me get promoted" is a private benefit. "It would let us evaluate the scheme rather than merely count it" is a public one.

Then, for every course feature you name, run the chain: **course feature, then capability gained, then gap addressed, then future application.** If a feature cannot complete the chain, it does not belong however interesting it is.

Features you can legitimately cite. Particular modules, a specialist research centre or institute, named faculty expertise, laboratories or technical facilities, research methods training, placements, industry or government partnerships, interdisciplinary components, fieldwork, and consultancy or professional projects. Choose two or three, never more.

Part three: naming, in this essay

This is where naming is expected, and where most applicants still do it badly by listing rather than connecting.

- **Name the course exactly**, as the handbook writes it, including the award.
- **Name two or three modules exactly.**

- **Name the research centre or institute.**
- **Name two academics with their positions**, because a position carries information: "Professor Helen Aird, who directs the Ashcombe Centre for Public Service Reform" places her, where "Professor Aird, a leading academic" does not.

Name what of theirs you will use. A name with no reason attached is worse than no name, because it shows you searched rather than read.

Name any prior contact. If you have corresponded with a faculty member, used their dataset, attended their seminar or contributed to work they edited, say so in a clause. This is the single strongest evidence that your research was real, and almost nobody has it. If you do, do not bury it.

Name the policy document or framework your problem already sits inside, by its title, and use the funder's own vocabulary where it exists. Citing a UK priority area or a named bilateral partnership in its exact wording signals that you read the strategy documents of the institution you are asking for money.

The zoom. Give the national figure and then your own province or district. "Coverage nationally is 38 per cent; in Katiba Province, where I will return, it is 30." It proves you are going somewhere specific and it makes paragraph four concrete.

Part four: four reasons that score nothing

Rankings and reputation. Every applicant has the same league tables.

Prospectus text. Marketing prose is recognisable at a glance, because it is written in a register no applicant uses anywhere else in their form. The same applies to tourism copy.

The city rather than the course. Landmarks, nightlife, football clubs. Chevening names this explicitly as an error. So is wanting to experience British culture, see London, or improve your English. The last one raises a question about whether you can complete the degree.

Course content in the abstract. "A comprehensive curriculum covering key aspects of the field" describes no course, and therefore evidences no research.

Part five: research before you write

- ☐ Full module list from the current handbook, including optional modules
- ☐ Assessment structure: dissertation, placement, client project, simulation
- ☐ Two academics, their exact titles, and one specific recent piece of work each
- ☐ The research centre or institute attached to the programme
- ☐ Any departmental partnership with institutions in your country

- ☐ One national strategy or policy document naming your problem, by its title
- ☐ One UK institution, bilateral framework or FCDO programme in your sector
- ☐ Your national figure and your provincial figure
- ☐ The sentence "I cannot currently..." completed

If you cannot complete that final sentence, you have not yet found your argument.

Part six: writing it, paragraph by paragraph

Paragraph one: the problem and the priority area, around 70 words

Open with a diagnosis drawn from your own work, not with the university.

Variant one, the misdiagnosis correction.

"Four years of registration work taught me that low coverage in Katiba is not a demand problem but an administrative one. The entitlement exists, the registrar is 26km away, and nobody measures the gap. My priority area is supporting development for more inclusive and effective societies."

Variant two, the false trade-off.

"As counsel to the National Energy Regulatory Commission I see the bind a fast-growing economy is in. Electrification cannot wait and neither can the emissions path, and treating them as separate files makes both worse. My priority area is building resilience in a climate-vulnerable world."

Variant three, the structural imbalance, with the zoom.

"Women hold a fifth of the seats in our National Assembly and 9 per cent of district council chairs. In Katiba Province, where I work, no woman has chaired a council since 2011. My priority is supporting development for more inclusive and effective societies."

Variant four, the capability vacuum plus scarcity.

"The National Adaptation Plan commits to district-level flood modelling. No agency in the country can produce one, and there are perhaps four people here trained in the hydrology it needs. My priority area is building resilience in a climate-vulnerable world."

Variant five, the cost of the status quo.

"The Katiba Revenue Authority writes off 21 per cent of assessed small-business tax each year as uncollectable, concentrated in the sectors least able to survive an audit. Having run three compliance

pilots, I am convinced this is a design failure rather than an enforcement failure. My priority area is promoting growth and prosperity."

Paragraph two: the course and the gap it closes, around 110 words

The formula: your experience, plus the named gap, plus named modules, plus the deliverable you will be able to produce afterwards.

"I can produce evidence but I have never designed an evaluation. The MSc Social Policy and Evaluation at Northgate University addresses that directly: its Impact Evaluation module covers the quasi-experimental designs our registration pilots have never had, and Public Service Design gives me the frameworks to test whether a service reaches the people it was written for rather than counting forms processed."

"The Energy Regulation and International Climate Law modules will give me the frameworks to write sustainability conditions into licensing, and the drafting skills to make them enforceable rather than aspirational."

"I have run three compliance pilots and cannot say which worked, because I had no counterfactual. Applied Microeconometrics and Tax Policy and Administration give me identification strategies and comparative design, which is the difference between advocating a reform and defending it to a treasury committee."

Teaching and assessment count.

"The dissertation route allows fieldwork, so I intend to validate a downscaled model against the 2024 Katiba flood records rather than a synthetic dataset."

"The consultancy term places students with a live public client, and I intend to use it on a small-business compliance question rather than a hypothetical one."

Paragraph three: the university and its people, around 60 words

Two named academics with positions and reasons.

"Professor Helen Aird, who directs the Ashcombe Centre for Public Service Reform, works on incentive design in frontline services, which is precisely our constraint: registrars are assessed on volume rather than coverage. Dr Marcus Oyelaran's fieldwork on how households actually use entitlements gives me a model for designing around real behaviour rather than assumed need."

The centre or partnership angle.

"The Ashcombe Centre works directly with national registration authorities rather than only publishing

about them, which is the difference between learning a method and learning to install one."

The prior-contact angle.

"Dr Oyelaran supervised the chapter I contributed to the Centre's 2025 volume on service access, and it was that correspondence that showed me how far my evaluation methods fall short of his."

The bilateral hook and why the UK. One clause placing your work inside a real UK partnership framework or an FCDO programme in your sector. If you have room, say why the UK rather than anywhere else, in professional terms: a regulatory framework, a standards regime other countries copy, a body of case law, an institution that pioneered the approach, or a transition your sector went through decades earlier.

Paragraph four: immediate application, around 60 words

Place, partner, action, and a way of knowing.

"In my first year back I will replicate the outreach model in Molo and Sisan, the two districts with the lowest coverage in the province, with the Provincial Registrar's office, and evaluate it properly against a matched comparison. If the effect holds at twelve months, that becomes the case for the eleven districts in Katiba."

"I will run a randomised compliance trial with the Katiba Revenue Authority's regional office in the two districts with the highest write-off rates, working with the Small Business Council that already sits on our taxpayer forum."

Both are small, real, startable in month one, name a partner who already knows the applicant, and end by showing how a local result becomes the argument for a larger one.

Part seven: your other two choices

You write about the first choice only, but all three appear on the form and are read alongside the essay. They need not be identical and may sit in different disciplines, but they must share a thematic core. Data science, public policy and business administration reads as somebody who has not decided what they are for. Data science, public policy analytics and evidence-based policy reads as somebody with a direction and some flexibility about how to reach it.

The university swap test. Replace your university's name with another and reread. If most of the essay still works, the argument is generic. Everything that survives the swap is decoration; everything that breaks is the actual case.

Part eight: two full sample answers

Sample one, civil registration (299 words)

All names anonymised and reinvented.

Fewer than half the children in Katiba Province hold a birth certificate, and without one they cannot sit national exams or later inherit land. Nationally coverage is 38 per cent; in Katiba it is 30. Four years of registration work has convinced me this is an administrative failure rather than a demand failure, and my priority area is supporting development for more inclusive and effective societies.

I can generate evidence but I have never designed an evaluation, which is why Kalima Registration Outreach cannot yet be costed for national rollout. The MSc Social Policy and Evaluation at Northgate University closes that gap directly. Its Impact Evaluation module covers the quasi-experimental designs our pilots have never had, and Public Service Design gives me frameworks to test whether a service reaches the people it was written for rather than counting forms processed. The dissertation route permits fieldwork, so I intend to evaluate the notification protocol against a matched comparison in Molo.

I chose Northgate for the Ashcombe Centre for Public Service Reform, which works with national registration authorities rather than only publishing about them. Professor Helen Aird's research on incentive design in frontline services addresses our exact constraint, that registrars are assessed on volume rather than coverage. Dr Marcus Oyelaran supervised the chapter I contributed to the Centre's 2025 volume on service access, and that correspondence showed me how far my methods fall short of his.

In my first year back I will replicate the outreach model in Molo and Sisan, the two lowest-coverage districts, with the Provincial Registrar's office, and evaluate it properly. If the effect holds at twelve months, that becomes the case for extending to all eleven districts in Katiba and the evidence base the Civil Registration Technical Advisory Group currently lacks.

Sample two, public finance (298 words)

The Katiba Revenue Authority writes off 21 per cent of assessed small-business tax each year as uncollectable, and the write-offs concentrate in exactly the sectors least able to survive an audit. Having run three compliance pilots, I am convinced this is a design failure rather than an enforcement failure. My priority area is promoting growth and prosperity, since domestic revenue funds everything else we say we want.

I could never say which of those pilots worked, because I had no counterfactual and no way to construct one. The MSc Public Financial Management at Brackenhill University closes that gap. Applied Microeconometrics gives me the identification strategies I lack, and Tax Policy and Administration provides the comparative designs for presumptive regimes that I have been improvising. The policy consultancy term places students with a live public client, and I intend to use mine on small-business compliance rather than a hypothetical case.

I chose Brackenhill for the Institute for Revenue Studies, which advises revenue authorities directly rather than writing about them. Professor Daniel Roux's work on behavioural approaches to compliance in low-capacity administrations addresses our binding constraint, which is enforcement capacity we will never afford. Dr Priya Ramanathan's comparative research on presumptive tax gives me designs I can adapt rather than invent, and her 2025 dataset covers three administrations at our stage.

In my first year back I will run a randomised compliance trial with the Authority's Katiba regional office in the two districts with the highest write-off rates, working with the Small Business Council that already sits on our taxpayer forum. If the design holds, it becomes the evidence base for redesigning the presumptive regime nationally.

What both samples do. They open on a diagnosis with the national figure zoomed to the province. They name the priority area in a full sentence. They complete "I cannot currently". They name the course, two modules and the assessment structure exactly. They name a centre, two academics with positions, and what of theirs they will use. One carries prior contact. They end with a first-year plan naming place, partner, evaluation and route to scale.

Part nine: dos and don'ts

Do

- Name one priority area in Chevening's exact words, in a full sentence
- Open with a diagnosis from your own work
- Give the national figure and then your own province
- Write about your first choice only
- Name two or three modules exactly as the handbook writes them
- Say what each module lets you produce that you cannot produce now
- Mention how the course is taught and assessed
- Name two academics with their positions and what of theirs you will use
- Name the research centre or institute
- State any prior contact with the department in a clause
- Say why the UK specifically, in professional terms
- Finish with a first-year plan naming place, partner and action
- Keep all three course choices thematically connected

Don't

- Mention rankings, prestige or reputation
- Describe all three course choices
- Copy any sentence from a university or tourism website

- Justify the university by the city, its landmarks or its football club
 - Mention British culture, London, or improving your English
 - Name a professor without saying what of theirs you will use
 - Say the course will give you "knowledge of" anything
 - Promise to "apply my learning to help my country"
 - Introduce a second priority area late
 - Leave module names unchecked against the current handbook
-
-

Part ten: common mistakes, and the fix



MISTAKE	WHY IT COSTS MARKS	THE FIX
"The university is world-renowned and highly ranked."	Says nothing about you.	Name the centre, the pedagogy, the partnership, the faculty.
Discussing all three choices.	Contradicts the criteria and dilutes all three.	First choice only; spend the words on modules.
"I will gain knowledge in public policy."	Names no gap, so any course would do.	"I cannot currently do X. This module teaches X."
A professor named with no reason.	Reads as a web search.	Add their position and what of their work you will apply.
Copying from the course page.	Recognisable at a glance.	Rewrite from the point of view of what you need.
The city, landmarks, football, British culture, English.	Named by Chevening as errors, and the last one is a risk.	Replace with the sector reason: regulation, standards, case law.
No priority area named.	Loses a scored element.	One sentence in Chevening's exact wording.
No statement of existing capability.	The gap has no baseline.	One clause of X before naming Y.
Only the national statistic.	Does not show where you are going.	Add your province or district figure.
The essay survives the university swap.	The argument is generic.	Add what only this department has.
Three courses in three unrelated fields.	Reads as unfocused.	Keep a thematic core.
Module names slightly wrong.	Suggests you never read the handbook.	Check every title before submitting.
"I will apply my learning to help my country."	Not a plan.	Place, partner, action, first year, and how you will know.

Part eleven: checklists

While drafting

- ☐ One priority area, Chevening's wording, full sentence
- ☐ A diagnosis drawn from my own work
- ☐ National figure zoomed to my province or district
- ☐ "My experience equipped me to do X, but I lack Y, which limits Z" is answerable

- ☐ Two or three modules named exactly, each completing the feature chain
- ☐ One point about teaching or assessment
- ☐ Two academics with positions and reasons
- ☐ The research centre named
- ☐ Prior contact stated, if I have it
- ☐ Why the UK, in professional terms
- ☐ First-year plan with place, partner, action and a way to know

Before submitting

- ☐ All four sub-questions visibly answered
- ☐ First-choice course only
- ☐ Module and centre names verified against the current handbook
- ☐ Both academics currently teach there and are spelled correctly
- ☐ No sentence that could come from a prospectus or tourism page
- ☐ The essay fails the university swap test, which is what it should do
- ☐ All three course choices are different, on the course finder, thematically linked
- ☐ The problem here is the problem running through Essays 1 and 2
- ☐ The first-year plan is not repeated in Essay 4
- ☐ Within the word limit shown next to the box



THE APPLICATION LAB

Want a second pair of eyes on your Chevening essays?

Everything in this guide is easier to see in someone else's draft than your own.

TAL mentors have won or shortlisted for Chevening and other major scholarships, and the community is free to join.

APPLY FOR MENTORSHIP

Apply Now →

1:1 mentor matched to your programme

DISCOVERY CALL

Book a Free Call →

20 minutes with the TAL team

FREE COMMUNITY

Join on WhatsApp →

Free to join, no commitment

LinkedIn /theapplicationlab

Instagram @theapplicationlab

YouTube @TheApplicationLab

All names, institutions, universities, professors, statistics and organisations used as examples in this guide are invented for illustration only. In your own application every name must be real, accurate and defensible at interview. © 2026 The Application Lab · Edspire Labs Ltd · This resource is free to share in its original, unedited form and is not for resale.

