



DESIGN: ABIR HOSSAIN

STUDY ABROAD

A guide to the Chevening Scholarships for Law students

MAHAPARA SANJANA

The Chevening Scholarship is one of the most prestigious scholarships funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), with an acceptance rate of less than three percent. The scholarship covers everything, from tuition fees to living expenses. As it is an incredibly competitive scholarship, it has a unique eligibility criterion.

An aspiring applicant will need to have an undergraduate degree that qualifies them to pursue a postgraduate degree at a UK university, two years of work experience, and be a citizen of a Commonwealth country. A successful applicant will also need to possess and show the following excellent leadership capabilities: great networking skills, a clear career plan, and two references attesting to their potential to complete a challenging degree in the UK.

Start early and strategically

When I look back on my journey from an aspiring applicant to a current Chevening scholar, the first thing I go back to is how early I had started my preparations.

Chevening applications normally open in August and close in November. I started working on my essays and getting in touch with my referees in June 2023. Prior to that, for a year, I focused on enhancing my resume to ensure that my professional and academic experiences aligned with Chevening's core values of leadership, networking, and career development. I began taking up more voluntary leadership roles within my university as an MUN mentor, a mooted coach, and a member of the self-assessment committee for curriculum development. I made sure that I had a clear career plan to work with when applying because that is one of the most important things to know as an aspiring Chevening scholar.

Crafting a strong professional profile

Chevening places a strong emphasis on professional achievements and leadership potential. As a Law student, I had the advantage of doing internships at both local law firms and legal aid organisations. However, what stood out in my application was my teaching experience, and my commitment to legal education reform and innovative teaching strategies as an educator. This experience demonstrated my ability to inspire and mentor others, a trait Chevening highly values.

Articulating your vision

Your career-plan essay is the heart of your application. For Law students, it's essential to demonstrate how your expertise can address pressing legal issues or contribute to policy reforms in your home country. In my case, I focused on my passion for human rights law. I highlighted my work with a

non-governmental organisation that provided legal aid to marginalised communities, explaining how this experience shaped my commitment to social justice.

I also outlined my aspiration to influence legal education in Bangladesh by introducing more practical and interdisciplinary approaches. Remember, specificity is key; avoid vague statements and back your claims with concrete examples.

The value of academic and extracurricular achievements

While professional experience is crucial, academic excellence is equally important for aspiring Chevening scholars. If you have achievements like having academic publications, research and teaching experience, and experience with moot court competitions, make sure to highlight them. Extracurricular activities, such as volunteering or participating in pro bono initiatives, can also set you apart. Work experience does not mean full-time work; it can be voluntary, part-time, or even internship experience.

Preparing for the interview

The Chevening interview is your chance to bring your application to life. I approached it as a conversation – essentially a dialogue between intellectuals as opposed to an interview where I am getting grilled.

To prepare, I reviewed my essays thoroughly and practised articulating my responses to common questions about leadership, networking, and career goals. I also prepared specific anecdotes to illustrate my points, ensuring they were concise yet impactful.

Key tip: be authentic. Chevening is looking for individuals who are not only accomplished but also deeply motivated to create meaningful change, so let your passion shine through.

Final thoughts

As a Law student, your unique perspective on justice and governance can make a significant impact. Start early, stay focused, and believe in the value of your journey. One really important thing that helped me was knowing exactly which field I would be contributing to in my home country after completing my studies in the UK.

Also, most applicants make the mistake of making their essays too personal and don't paint a picture with examples and anecdotes of professional leadership and networking narratives.

It is imperative to have a coherent link throughout all four of your essays. You need to ensure that your essays tell the story of who you are, what your aspirations are, how you plan to give back to your country and community, and why you would be an asset to the Chevening community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mahapara Sanjana is a Chevening scholar and human rights defender with a passion for social justice and legal education reform. She is currently pursuing an MA in Social Justice and Education at the University of York in the UK with a Chevening Scholarship.

Mahapara completed her Bachelor of Laws from BRAC University. Soon after graduating, she joined the legal aid and policy sector and worked in legal aid and development for a couple of years. She then proceeded to do her first masters in the UK and after coming back, she started teaching Law at Southeast University. She is currently on study leave from Southeast University pursuing her second masters in the UK as a Chevening scholar.

With experience in legal research, teaching, and advocacy, Mahapara aims to empower marginalised communities and influence educational policy change in her home country. When she is not immersed in research and drowning in schoolwork, she can be found mentoring aspiring Law students and exploring intersectional and interdisciplinary approaches to legal challenges.

Apart from being a scholar, lawyer, and academic, Mahapara also dabbles in fire-spinning, DJing, poetry, perfumery, and contemporary dance.

