

AUT

A FUTURE IN
LAW





A LAW CAREER

For many people, the words 'law' and 'lawyers' conjure up images of popular television series like *The Lincoln Lawyer*, *Partner Track* or *The Good Wife*. Often it is this kind of influence that gives us our first impression of law as a career. However, television shows are not always very accurate in their portrayal of law practice and do not depict the full range of options available for those with law qualifications.

Traditional legal practice areas include commercial/corporate law, property, banking and finance, litigation and tax, crime, family law and many specialisations within these. Alternatively, many graduates use their law degree to build careers outside of legal practice, in a wide variety of industries and employment sectors. Today, the law degree is increasingly regarded as much a generalist degree as a specific degree for legal practice.

Do you enjoy reading, listening and debating? Are you able to communicate arguments clearly and concisely using reason and logic? Are you interested in law, society and solving problems that arise in all forms of human interaction? Are you motivated by a sense of justice and a desire to help others? If so, a career in law could be just the thing for you.

OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

Legal profession growing

Employment in the legal profession in New Zealand is growing steadily. Growth of over 2% per annum is predicted to continue until at least 2028. However, competition for positions can be intense, particularly for new graduates.

Source: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Variety of options

Lawyers with corporate and commercial experience are in demand for boutique, medium-sized and large firms. Experienced banking and finance solicitors are especially required in major law firms. There is also demand for solicitors with insurance litigation, regulatory and risk compliance, and construction experience. Climate change is another area requiring legal expertise. There are also a growing number of roles specialising in Te Tiriti o Waitangi legal work.

International opportunities

A popular option for New Zealand graduates is to work for a few years locally and then head overseas for two or three years before returning. The majority go to the UK, however countries like Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore and the Middle East (Dubai in particular) also provide good opportunities.

WORK SETTINGS

In New Zealand, a lawyer automatically qualifies to practise as both a barrister and solicitor and can switch between the roles and act in both capacities as required.

Initially graduates may gain roles as law clerks or, once they have completed the Professional Legal Studies Course, as graduate solicitors. Career progression in a law firm usually involves starting as a staff solicitor before progressing to associate and partnership roles.

Some smaller and medium sized law firms are reluctant to employ new graduates because of the resources involved in training them – such firms prefer to recruit people with about two years post-graduation experience and rely on the larger firms to do the training.

CAREER OPTIONS IN PRIVATE LEGAL PRACTICE

• Law firms

In a large firm, solicitors are able to specialise and will usually be rotated around different departments (eg commercial, litigation, employment). In a medium or smaller suburban firm it is necessary to be more of a jack of all trades, encompassing areas like family relationships, wills, family trusts, minor criminal law matters and road traffic offences.

• Barrister chambers

A barrister's work is more court-orientated than that of a solicitor. Barristers appear and conduct proceedings in court and write opinions about contested legal matters.

• In-house counsel/legal departments

Working in the legal section of a large corporate or commercial organisation (eg banking and finance, insurance, mining, accountancy, educational or government). Positions like in-house counsel will entail general commercial work, contracts, and compliance with regulations.

Specialisations are possible in areas like commercial, civil, family, criminal, resource management, international, public, environmental, intellectual property, labour, biotechnology, e-commerce, property, sports, insurance and taxation.

OUTSIDE OF PRIVATE LEGAL PRACTICE

There are a vast range of employment opportunities within other industries and employment sectors outside of private legal practice.

Public service employment in legal and law related areas

• Law, justice and regulation

Crown Law Office, Ministry of Justice, Attorney-General's Department, Ombudsman New Zealand, Law Commission, Serious Fraud Office, Classification Office, Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal, Coronial Services.

• Trade, industry, commerce

Consumer Protection, The Treasury New Zealand, Public Trust, Inland Revenue – Te Tari Taake, Banking Ombudsman Scheme, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Employment New Zealand, Fisheries New Zealand.

• Society, people, environment

Te Puni Kōkiri – Kāinga, Human Rights Commission, Children's Commissioner, Health and Disability Commissioner, Te Kāhui Whakatau (Treaty Settlements), Ministry of Health NZ, Department of Conservation, ACC.

• Government and defence

Local Government, Parliament, Ministry of Defence.

International public service employers in legal and law related areas

United Nations, War Claims Tribunals, Amnesty International, Greenpeace, International Labour Organization, International Criminal Court, humanitarian organisations, and NGOs.

Knowledge economy opportunities

Roles involving patent attorney work, law and scientific development and research, environmental impact (GE and the law) work, and cloning (legal implications).

Private commercial sector

Legal or non-legal (eg executive or management) roles in large companies involved in banking and finance, insurance, mining, and accountancy services.

Academic

Universities, polytechnics and high schools – teaching and research.

Other possibilities

Many graduates complete a conjoint or double degree, opening up yet more career paths. Examples include journalism, legal publishing, banking, investment, accounting and finance, public relations, consultancy, diplomacy, and arts and creative technologies.

SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE

Skills

- Think critically and apply problem solving skills to recognise, analyse, evaluate and resolve legal issues
- Apply logical reasoning, evidence-based and rational argument and outcome-orientated negotiation
- Communicate appropriately and accurately both orally and in writing
- Use current technologies and effective research strategies to retrieve, evaluate and apply legal information and other material
- Work effectively and productively alone and in a team

Knowledge

- A detailed understanding of legal rules and principles and the mechanisms through which they evolve
- Ability to seek out answers to practical legal problems when presented
- Knowledge of New Zealand laws and the legal system and courthouse and tribunals procedure

PERSONAL QUALITIES

- Sensitive to diverse people and work environments
- Possess a sense of community and professional responsibility
- Able to identify and offer appropriate solutions to ethical dilemmas
- Think logically and find appropriate solutions under pressure

SALARY GUIDE

Salaries vary depending on role and location. Bonuses may be available.

	Salary (per year)
Graduate	\$53,000-\$61,000
1 year after graduation	\$58,000-\$68,000
1-2 years' experience	\$65,000-\$75,000
2-3 years' experience	\$75,000-\$90,000
5 years' experience	\$95,000-\$145,000
Senior/partner roles	\$145,000-\$175,000+

Sources: Careers NZ, Hays Salary Guide FY23/24, Robert Walters Salary Guide 2023, NZ Law Society.

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication (mid 2023) and should only be used as a guideline.

PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION

To work as a lawyer in New Zealand, you need:

- An approved Bachelor of Laws degree (LLB)
- To complete the Professional Legal Studies Course
- A certificate of character from the New Zealand Law Society
- Admission to the roll of barristers and solicitors of the High Court of New Zealand
- A current practising certificate issued by the New Zealand Law Society

THE AUT ADVANTAGE

AUT Law School qualifications have been developed in close consultation with the legal profession. These highly respected qualifications prepare you for legal practice or a wide range of other careers.

The practical application of law underpins the AUT LLB. Students gain experience at putting theory into practice, eg preparing submissions, drafting legal opinions seeking to solve practically based legal problems, and other commercial documents.

FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

Further study in law is available at postgraduate level, including an honour's year, Postgraduate Certificate in Law, Master of Laws, Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy. Research areas include fraud, copyright, international law, taxation, cross lease and unit title issues etc.



CHERI-ROSE SMITH

Solicitor, Tamaki Legal

Bachelor of Laws and Master of Human Rights

"I have recently taken up a solicitor role at Tamaki Legal, a firm that specialises largely in Treaty of Waitangi law. I work in Kaupapa Inquiries within the scope of the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal, specifically on housing, Mana Wāhine and health inquiries and how the Crown has failed Treaty of Waitangi obligations in these specific contexts.

Initially, after graduating, I utilised my Master of Human Rights working for the Nationwide Health and Disability Advocacy service, assisting health and disability service users with raising complaints and providing education sessions.

I then decided to pursue a career in law and joined a small firm (MK Law) as an immigration lawyer, then moved to Duncan Cotterill's immigration team. As an immigration lawyer, I assisted employers and employees with their immigration obligations.

My Treaty of Waitangi work involves meeting with claimants to ascertain their causes of action and kōrero around stories shared that could be used as evidence, contextual research, assessing reports provided by the tribunal historians, preparation of submissions, and attending tribunal hearings. This includes analysing new legislation and how it may address our clients' issues. I'm also part of the Constitutional Inquiry and I'm doing some Marine and Coastal Act work for the High Court.

I'm enjoying the historical element of the Kaupapa Inquiries and learning more about the true history of Aotearoa. I also enjoy spending time immersed in specific issues.

My advice to graduates is to find an area of the law you feel passionate about. Don't forget you can build the career you want and don't need to follow the 'standard' path."

EMPLOYER COMMENT

"With young lawyers, we look for strong academic records, good work ethic, empathy and an interest in advocating for human rights.

Cheri-Rose is a people person who wants to help others. She has a can do attitude that makes her a pleasure to work with. There is deep faith in her abilities as a lawyer.

Law graduates need strong writing, speaking and analytical skills to keep developing their legal knowledge. The quality of their work and the manner in which their work is completed will be noted.

Exude commitment and enthusiasm. Be prepared to address the weaknesses in your job application. Sometimes you have to take a backward or sidestep to ultimately move forward."

Darrell Naden

Managing Director, Tamaki Legal

USEFUL WEBSITES

New Zealand Law Society
Te Kāhui Ture o Aotearoa
lawsociety.org.nz

Auckland District Law Society
adls.org.nz

NZ Lawyer
thelawyermag.com/nz


FURTHER INFORMATION

For the most up-to-date information on the study of law, visit our website:
aut.ac.nz/law

For other Future Career Sheets visit:
aut.ac.nz/careersheets


EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

For employability and career support, AUT students can book an appointment through <https://elab.aut.ac.nz/>

 @AUTEmployabilityandCareers

FUTURE STUDENTS

Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: aut.ac.nz/enquire
futurestudents@aut.ac.nz

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