

# What can I do with a degree in Law?

# Law



## What is Law?

Legal professionals have to think critically, analyse facts and issues, and persuade through logical argument. They work with legal systems, policies, cases and legal material, and understand the law within its wider social, political and historical context.

Legal professionals are employed in a range of legal-specific jobs such as a solicitor, prosecutor, court officer, or a legal advisor. Their transferable skills also allow them to work across different professions, from consultants, analysts, to publishers.

Legal professionals may choose to work in a specialised field of law, such as law and medicine, family, media, international, human rights, property and environmental, company and commercial, criminal, or insurance law. Specific Aotearoa New Zealand legal issues pertaining to Māori and the Treaty of Waitangi, require specialist understanding of tikanga Māori.

Many Law students study towards a double degree as it combines easily with Arts, Commerce, and Criminal Justice. To learn how to become a Lawyer, visit [www.lawsociety.org.nz/starting-as-a-lawyer](http://www.lawsociety.org.nz/)

## Learn more

It is important to do some research when planning a future career. Speak with, ask questions of, and follow relevant professional bodies, organisations, companies, thought leaders and industry professionals to learn more about:

- Career opportunities, work environments and salary information
- Education and training requirements.

### Examples of professional bodies

- New Zealand Law Society | Te Kāhui Teru o Aotearoa [www.lawsociety.org.nz](http://www.lawsociety.org.nz)
- Te Hunga Rōia Māori o Aotearoa Māori Law Society [www.maorilawsociety.co.nz](http://www.maorilawsociety.co.nz)
- Canterbury Women's Legal Association <https://cwla.org.nz/>
- New Zealand Bar Association [www.nzbar.org.nz](http://www.nzbar.org.nz)
- In-house Lawyers Association [www.ilanz.org.nz](http://www.ilanz.org.nz)
- Arbitrators' and Mediators' Institute of NZ Inc [www.aminz.org.nz](http://www.aminz.org.nz)

- Restructuring, Insolvency and Turnaround Association of New Zealand Inc [www.ritanz.org.nz](http://www.ritanz.org.nz)
- Public Service Association Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi [www.psa.org.nz](http://www.psa.org.nz)

## Career and study information

Some study pathways and degrees have a recommended school background, and some careers may require further study beyond a first degree or additional experience.

### Gather helpful information from:

- Subject-specific content at [www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/academic-study/subjects/law](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/academic-study/subjects/law)
- Job profiles on career websites like [www.careers.govt.nz](http://www.careers.govt.nz)
- Job adverts/vacancy descriptions
- Industry professional bodies.

This resource is part of a set of brochures focused on subject majors; many can also be studied as minors.



## What skills can graduates gain?

Through studying a degree in Law, graduates develop a valuable set of skills and competencies. These skills can include:

- Analysing, evaluating, critiquing, and synthesising a variety of information types
- Problem solving, exercising judgment and making reasoned decisions
- Applying a sense of justice and basic principles of fairness and professional ethics
- Understanding Aotearoa New Zealand law principles and placing them in a global context
- Acquiring new knowledge as the law develops
- Self-management, hard work and ability to meet deadlines
- Presentation of oral and written communication
- Resilience and adaptability
- Planning, organisation, and collaboration.

### Applied Learning

Opportunities to apply your knowledge and skills can be pursued through a range of skills-based courses, internships, student competitions (such as client interviewing, negotiating, mooting, and witness examination), and volunteering.

These experiences deepen your skillset, awareness of others, working knowledge, and employability. They can also inform your learning and skill development in the classroom.

### What do employers look for?

Many employers look for generic skills such as communication, client/customer-focus, bicultural competence, cultural awareness, teamwork and initiative.

With technology, globalisation, and other drivers changing society, skills such as resilience, problem solving, and adaptability are important.

Skills that are likely to grow in importance include analytical and creative thinking, systems thinking, technological literacy, AI and big data.\*

\*World Economic Forum: [www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/05/future-of-jobs-2023-skills](http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/05/future-of-jobs-2023-skills)

### How can these skills be developed?

- Some skills are gained through studying
- Extra-curricular activities can help, such as getting involved in clubs, mentoring, cultural groups, part-time work or volunteering
- Be open to professional and personal development opportunities, whether it is undertaking work experience, overseas exchange, skills seminar, or joining an industry group.

## Where have graduates been employed?

### Legal profession

Many people study Law to enter the legal profession as a barrister and/or solicitor.

Another consideration is where to work — it is worth thinking about questions such as:

- Do you want to work by yourself as a self-employed barrister or solicitor?
- Do you want to work as an 'in-house' lawyer for an iwi or in the legal department of a private or public sector organisation?
- Do you want to work for a large national or small provincial law firm?

### Law-related careers

Graduates can follow other law-related careers. For example, as a policy officer in government organisations e.g. MFAT, MBIE.

Regional councils also employ law graduates in a variety of roles. Public sector employers include the Police, Corrections, Customs, and Land Information New Zealand.

In the private sector Law graduates have skills which are highly valued in finance and business.

Alumni can also be found working in media or publishing, health and safety, employment and trade union advocacy, education, research and advisory roles.

## What jobs and activities might graduates do?

Graduates with this degree are employed in a range of jobs — see some examples below.

Note: This list is not exhaustive, and some jobs may require further study, training or experience. It is recommended to start with the section 'How can I gain a sense of career direction?'

### Legal practice – barrister / solicitor

- Provide legal advice or legal opinions to clients and sometimes other lawyers
- Prepare documents for court cases
- Make submissions on behalf of clients
- Represent clients in negotiations, disputes and in court cases
- Draft legal documents such as commercial contracts, wills, leases etc
- Provide conveyancing services including helping clients buy and sell property
- Specialise in different areas of legal practice such as family, commercial, criminal or civil litigation, immigration and refugee, resource and environmental management, trusts etc

### Law clerk

- Complete submissions, legal research and analysis
- Support other lawyers in their day-to-day work

### Government policy analyst / advisor, public sector lawyer

- Identify and investigate issues and opportunities e.g. in society, law or governance
- Interpret and consult on existing policies
- Report on, and propose changes to, the law

### Legal advisor / in-house lawyer

- Administer the legal aspects of a company
- Prepare and interpret legal documents including contracts
- Ensure regulatory compliance e.g. on safety

### Māori resource advisor

- Assess claims under the Treaty of Waitangi
- Apply natural resource law to Māori resources

### Court officer

- Ensure successful operation of a court
- Respond to disturbances/security issues that arise during court proceedings

### Community lawyer

- Provide legal advice for those who may not otherwise have access to it, often at low cost
- Connect clients with resources
- Write reports and recommendations

### Prosecutor – Police / Crown

- Conduct legal proceedings for some criminal, traffic and youth prosecutions
- Advocate for police at coroner's inquests
- Support police districts at hearings
- Conduct proceedings in crown prosecutions
- Advise and represent the government on cases that affect all New Zealanders

### Public defence lawyer

- Help people access justice in criminal matters
- Defend clients in criminal court Judge's clerk
- Research and prepare opinions for the judge
- Oversee the processing of all judgments
- Administer meetings and help write speeches

### Examples of other job titles and careers include:

- Legal academic
- Company secretary
- Business analyst
- Management consultant
- Civil servant
- Legal executive
- Hearing manager
- Legal assistant
- Legal researcher
- Case coordinator
- Client assistant
- Information advisor
- Intelligence analyst
- Immigration officer.

## Further study options

Further study may facilitate career benefits such as specialist skills, entry into a specific occupation, higher starting salary, faster progression rate, and advanced research capability.

It is important to determine which, if any, further study options align with future career aspirations.

For further UC study options visit:

[www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/academic-study](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/academic-study)

## How can I gain a sense of career direction?

Understanding yourself and others is important to gain a sense of direction. This grows with experience; therefore, trying new things and reflecting on an ongoing basis is important.

### Career planning checklist

#### Discover and reflect on:

- Your values, interests, strengths, abilities, and aspirations
- Your connection to whānau, people, and places
- Lifestyle preferences and location
- The skills you want to gain, use, or enhance

#### Engage in a variety of experiences to learn about:

- How you want to contribute to society, the environment, and global challenges
- The tasks, responsibilities and work environments you prefer
- Your work values, priorities and interests

#### Learn more and gather career and study information

(refer to page one of this resource)

- Speak with people working in careers that interest you; check the realities of a job/career
- Gather information from various sources

#### Identify your next steps

- Talking to a career consultant can help you to identify your next steps. Visit: [www.canterbury.ac.nz/life/jobs-and-careers](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/life/jobs-and-careers)



## What have other students and graduates done?

Explore career stories of students' university experiences and UC alumni who make a difference globally in varied ways.

Visit: [www.canterbury.ac.nz/about-uc/why-uc/our-students/student-stories](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/about-uc/why-uc/our-students/student-stories)



### Keegan

Lawyer, WRMK Lawyers

Bachelor of Laws, and Bachelor of Commerce  
2022

### What is the most rewarding part of your job?

The most rewarding part of my job would be the people – including the amazing kaimahi (work colleges) I work with and their unconditional support. Also, having clients I engaged with as a part of my job, who rely on me to provide them with effective and accurate advice. Using the skills I obtained through my study at UC and applying them in a practical way is also rewarding.

### We hear you are launching a free legal clinic. Tell us a bit more about this.

For background, I am of Ngati Hine decent which is the local manawhenua (tribe) within Whangarei. Since leaving University I have had a goal of helping my community in any way I could. To achieve this, I had the idea of running and facilitating free legal clinics for the community/local mana whenua. I then contacted the Ngati Hine Health Trust and Community Law (155 Community House) to achieve this goal. Together, with WRMK's support, we have collaborated our skills and facilities to put this idea into action, with our first legal clinic running on 1 March 2023. I believe this is the first legal clinic of its kind, where an iwi organisation and community law are working together to help the local community in the legal space. For the sake of disclosure, the legal clinics will not provide formal legal advice but rather a "help station" where questions and referrals can be made, making the first step easier for anyone who is struggling with navigating the legal system (which is currently a huge gap in Northland).

### You studied a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of Commerce while at UC. How did you juggle both degrees?

It was never a juggle but more of a burdened pressure. If you can use good time management skills, then the pressure of two degrees can be a lot more manageable. I did this by structuring my timetables for lectures to work for me, which enabled me to manage my free time for assignments or other personal activities (gym, social sports, social outings). I also made the most of what UC had to offer and made sure I was proactive in the social settings by joining the social clubs, performing in Law Revue and being a tuakana/tutor for the Māori Development Team. Two degrees can be stressful but make the most of your time and have fun with it!

### Looking back on your time at UC, what memories and experiences have stayed with you?

The best time at Uni for me was being a law tutor (for the Māori Development Team) and performing in two Law Revues. I loved making new connections and relationships with people who had similar interests. Law Revue was just outright fun, and I would recommend anyone studying law to perform as a cast member, as this was the highlight of my time at UC.

## Career guidance

Career services are available for future and current students, and recent graduates. To learn more, contact:

Te Rōpū Rapuara | Careers

T: +64 3 369 0303

E: [careers@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:careers@canterbury.ac.nz)

[www.canterbury.ac.nz/life/jobs-and-careers](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/life/jobs-and-careers)

### Helpful career insights

- Speaking with employers is key to finding opportunities; not all jobs are advertised
- Developing an online presence is useful as employers can search for future employees online
- Learning about recruitment patterns and where to find opportunities is important.

## Study advice

Student Advisors at UC help with questions focused on starting, planning and changing studies. To connect with Student Advisors, visit:

[www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/study-support-info/study-support](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/study-support-info/study-support)

### Future students – contact:

The Future Students team

T: 0800 VARSITY (0800 827 748)

E: [futurestudents@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:futurestudents@canterbury.ac.nz)

### First year students – contact:

Kaitoko | First Year Student Advisors

T: +64 3 369 0409

E: [firstyearadvice@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:firstyearadvice@canterbury.ac.nz)

### Continuing students – contact:

Kaupeka Ture | Faculty of Law

T: +64 3 369 3555

E: [law-enquiries@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:law-enquiries@canterbury.ac.nz)

[www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/academic-study/law](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz/study/academic-study/law)

