

CAREER VIEW

LAW

Law has been defined as the cement of society and an essential medium of change. The rule of law remains a fundamental driver of our society 800 years after Magna Carta was signed. It underpins nearly every facet of our lives, public and private. The rights and responsibilities of individuals are upheld and differences are resolved through laws and legal procedure. As society changes so do laws through Acts of Parliament as well as through judicial decisions which create precedents. Over the years, the study and practice of law has been glamorised in film and television or portrayed as being dry and traditional. The reality is neither: law is complex and rigorous but also dynamic and evolving.

WHY STUDY LAW?

The study of law is extremely satisfying and can open up a world of career opportunities. It is also intellectually and academically challenging. Since just about every area of life has legal underpinnings, it's possible to focus your legal studies on what really interests you as you progress through your degree. For example, if you were interested in court work and the justice system, you may elect to take courses that involve the legislative process, jurisprudence, rules of evidence, civil procedure, the law of torts, and criminal law. If your interests lie in the business world, you can concentrate on courses which deal with tax, banking, insurance, employment, and commercial law. If it's the environment, there are courses on natural resources, Māori land law, property, and resource management. If it's social issues, there's family law and welfare law.

In addition, the study of law complements other disciplines, particularly commerce, science and the humanities. For example, graduates with a conjoint or double degree in Law and Commerce are sought after by both law and chartered accountancy firms. A science or engineering degree coupled with a law degree is an ideal combination for patent attorney work or work in environmental law. A law degree and an arts degree in Film and Theatre could lead to a career in entertainment law. There are many options and combinations. All are good.



Career View explores how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities and to life/work planning. It includes graduate destination information and current employment issues. Your comments and suggestions are always welcomed.

Wellington Careers and Employment.
wgtn.ac.nz/careers

BECOMING A LAWYER

If you want to practise law, you need to do these things in the following order:

- Complete your Bachelor of Laws degree;
- Complete a practical professional legal studies course. The course varies from 13 weeks to 19 weeks, depending on the balance of face-to-face and distance delivery offered by the course provider;
- Be admitted to the High Court of New Zealand as a barrister and solicitor;
- Apply for and hold a current practising certificate issued by a district law society. This is renewed annually.

Once admitted, a lawyer can work as a barrister or a solicitor. Barristers work mainly in courts or tribunals presenting evidence, making submissions on behalf of their clients, and otherwise representing their interests in, for example, criminal trials, or Family Court proceedings. Solicitors provide general legal advice over a range of specialised areas, including the buying and selling of property, drafting wills, arranging finance, tax and company legalities, and custody and property matters in the event of relationship breakdown.

WHAT SKILLS DO LAW GRADUATES HAVE?

A law degree extends students both intellectually and personally. Law graduates would be able to demonstrate:

Intellectual power: A law degree will cover legal concepts, theory, principles, the legislative process, interpretation of the law, rules of evidence and much, much more. As a result, law students learn to abstract, compare, contrast, and cross-reference information. They use **critical analysis** and **balanced judgement** to identify themes, patterns, principles and discrepancies.

Organised understanding: Law students are required to understand and integrate considerable amounts of specialised information. The process of transforming volumes of statute law, case law and legal precedent into some kind of conceptual whole requires skills of **concentration, memory, deduction** and **logical analysis**.

Language skills: Law students become adept at the art of argument both orally and in writing. Management and professional roles in particular depend on the



ability to communicate clearly and effectively, as they typically involve writing reports, strategic plans, policy documents, case notes or job descriptions. They also require people who can speak with confidence, authority and clarity, simplify complicated information, and persuade others.

Problem-solving skills: To the extent that the law is problem-solving on a large scale, law graduates are problem-solvers on a smaller scale. They understand the value of terms of reference, rules, limits and boundaries. They can decide the legitimacy of accusations, complaints and grievances. They know the damage that breaches of confidence and unethical behaviour can cause. They understand the principles of negotiation and mediation. They have internalised the concept of justice and understand how to apply it. They can, if necessary, function in an adversarial environment.

Research and information management skills: Law libraries and legal databases are massive repositories of information. Law students learn to use them effectively and efficiently. Most of this information resides online, while some remains in archives and libraries. The ability to mine and interrogate databases and package their findings into reports or presentations is widely valued.

The ability to perform under pressure: Law students are expected to manage their time and balance their workload. The pressure can be high but it is excellent training for high-output work environments, where keeping cool under pressure is the basis of good cooperative team work and productive client relationships.

WHERE DO LAW GRADUATES WORK?

Law graduates have many career options, both within the legal profession and outside it. Examples of career options include:

Private Practice: Law graduates entering the profession often start out working for an established firm or legal practice. Most large law firms participate in an annual recruitment programme organised through university career services. These firms offer considerable opportunities for educational and professional development and a clear career path through their internship programmes. Selection procedures are fairly rigorous and the number of positions offered varies from year to year. Medium and smaller firms tend to recruit on an as-needed basis and often contact the university careers and employment services.

Government Agencies and Local Authorities

Parliament: A large proportion of parliamentary business is about the making and amending of laws. A bill (proposed law) passes through a sequence of defined stages before it becomes law and is subject to legal scrutiny throughout this process. A law degree can be a relevant qualification for policy, research or communications roles supporting Members of Parliament.

Office of the Clerk, Legal Services provides general and specialised legal support to a range of parliamentary bodies, including select committees. Law graduates are employed to provide support to the House of Representatives and the Select Committee Office. Lawyers are only recruited with several years' experience.

The **Parliamentary Counsel Office** drafts Government Bills and Legislative Instruments, and publishes Bills, Acts and Legislative Instruments online and in hard copy. Legislative drafting involves discussions with Ministers of the Crown and their advisers at all levels, appearing before select committees, and providing drafting advice in Parliament during the passage of legislation. The Parliamentary Counsel Office participates in the Government Legal Network Graduate Programme.

The **Crown Law Office** provides legal advice and representation for the government and its departments as well as appearing in court on behalf of the Crown. They can also recruit law clerks at the graduate level.

The **Law Commission** reviews and advises on the reform and development of the law. Several years' experience in law is preferred for an Advisor role.

They recruit Honours students as part-time law clerks during term time.

The **Ministry of Justice** gives the government policy advice about criminal justice or public law issues. A policy advisor needs a Law degree, particularly if the role has an emphasis on criminal or public law. A conjoint degree can also be valuable. For example, a Law degree coupled with History is useful for a role with the Office of Treaty Settlements, as the historical component of settlements involves legal contracts and assessing precedent risks for the Crown. A degree in Law and Public Policy is a good choice if you want to work within other parts of the Ministry, for example, as a policy analyst.

The **Public Defence Service** operates independently within the Ministry of Justice. It's New Zealand's largest criminal law practice and employs experienced lawyers and law graduates to provide high-quality criminal defence to clients who need legal aid.

The **Waitangi Tribunal** considers law graduates with a Master's degree and appropriate research and writing skills for its Research and Report Writing teams.

New Zealand Police contains a legal team, which provides legal advice and opinions, and the Police Prosecutions Service. Legal experience is generally required for both sections, but a clerk's position suitable for a graduate may be a possibility.

The **Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade** recruits annually for foreign policy officer roles. A good postgraduate degree (Honours or Master's) is required. Law graduates are particularly valued for their ability to work on the legal aspects of foreign policy and trade policy. A combination of law with





another degree in international relations, economics and/or languages and an understanding of tikanga Māori would be an advantage.

Other Ministries and Departments which conduct legal business or otherwise value legal training include: the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), Inland Revenue, the Ministry for the Environment, and the State Services Commission. Law is a desirable degree for international organisations such as the United Nations and the International Court of Justice. Postgraduate degrees are preferred.

Some local authorities, such as regional or city councils, have legal sections to manage statutory regulations, draft and enforce bylaws, and conduct other legal business. These are large organisations with many regulatory responsibilities.

Private Companies and SOEs

In-house legal counsel: Many large commercial organisations and state-owned enterprises employ in-house lawyers to carry out their legal business. Again, roles can be specialised, often with an emphasis on commercial property, commercial litigation, banking, finance or international law.

Management roles: Large corporates, management consultancies, financial services organisations and other business enterprises are keen to recruit law graduates for their management potential. In some companies a formal management trainee programme can offer opportunities for a high-level business career often

with the possibility of overseas secondment if the organisation is multinational.

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs): An NGO is any non-profit or voluntary citizens' group which is organised on a local, national or international level. NGOs can have in-house lawyers or use experienced law graduates in policy and management roles based in New Zealand or overseas.

Community Law Centres: These are a network of centres usually managed by an incorporated society or charitable trust, which offer free legal help to those who are disadvantaged. They are staffed largely by senior law students and volunteer lawyers, which is an excellent opportunity to gain legal experience as well as do social good. There are paid positions in some centres.

Education: If you are keen to develop an academic legal career, teaching and conducting research, a good first step is to discuss your aspirations with academic staff. Polytechnics also teach law-related courses, such as the NZLS Legal Executive Course, and there are teaching roles available in the professional legal studies courses.

Other Law-Related Roles

There are a range of roles which draw on a legal background but may require an alternative or additional qualification to a law degree. These include:

- **Legal executive:** These are trained professionals in their own right and can carry high levels of

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responsibility. They may specialise in, for example, property conveyancing or estate administration.

- **Legal researcher:** A specialised role which typically requires managing information systems and the ability to interpret and apply legislation. Excellent organisational skills and the ability to critically evaluate information are required.
- **Law librarian:** Sometimes combined with a research role, law librarians typically use electronic and print resources to research legal issues for lawyers and handle reference enquiries. Usually study towards a librarian qualification is desirable.
- **Legal administrator** and **legal secretary:** These roles usually require some legal background and always require organisational ability and initiative.
- **Case manager:** Generally a role within the Court system often working in a particular Court, for example the Environment Court. The role involves managing the progress of cases through the judicial system.
- **Legal editor:** Legal publishers employ a good number of fresh law graduates as required and they are valued for their enthusiasm and intelligence.

Because of its fundamental place in the scheme of things, the legal system effectively supports its own specialised industry. There are, for example, human resource consultancies which specialise in legal recruitment and legal conference producers.

Law is an excellent complement to journalism. Union organisers often have a legal background. Legal training is useful for roles involving clients with contractual arrangements such as literary or sports agents. A law degree travels very well and continues to work for you long after graduation.

JOB TITLES

The following is a sample of job titles taken from our graduate destination surveys. Some roles may require postgraduate qualifications and training.

Account executive • assistant investigator • barrister
 • broadcaster • business analyst • business consultant
 • case editor • claims advisor • client services adviser
 • complaints assessor • contracts advisor • court registry officer • entrepreneur • foreign policy officer
 • investigator • journalist • law clerk • law librarian
 • legal advisor • legal editor • legal research assistant
 • patent examiner • policy advisor • policy analyst • politician • project manager • researcher • solicitor • tax consultant • writer.

Ataga'i Esera

Solicitor
Family Law Specialists



I started out doing a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) and a Bachelor of Commerce and Administration (BCA) majoring in Accountancy. At that stage, I thoroughly enjoyed Accounting but I was not sure about my law courses.

After graduating, I taught English in Japan for two years. On my return to New Zealand, I got a job as a Corporate Financial Accountant. However I did not find myself enjoying this role.

I decided to go back to Law School part time and this time discovered absolute joy in studying the law: pulling apart cases, breaking down legislation, drafting legal opinions and researching until the wee hours of the morning. Switching to complete my LLB full time was challenging. However, it meant I was back in the workforce as soon as possible, doing something I knew I would enjoy.

Family Law practice has various challenges and requires an eclectic toolkit. You need to have a level of social skill that enables you to speak directly into people's lives in a way that is easy for them to understand without offending them. A good understanding of the foundations of Family Law and a dash of empathy will get you by. Legal research and writing is an invaluable skill that I use in preparation for each of my defended hearings.

You are never too old to undertake a law degree. I have come across numerous practitioners who were previously teachers, counsellors, nurses and more. Law and its practice are constantly in motion so it is difficult to get bored with its subject matter!

Jamie Eng

Crown Prosecutor
Luke Cunningham Clere
Office of the Wellington Crown
Solicitor



I hadn't considered a law degree until a friend of my brother suggested taking the first-year course. At school I was doing subjects like History, Classics, French and English, and I had planned on doing a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Political Science at university. I still did the BA, but law opened up a way of looking at the world that really appealed to me, so I kept

going with it. The great thing about studying law is that it encompasses the whole range of human experience: relationships between individuals and groups; the protection of the natural environment; domestic politics; international politics; trade ... the list goes on!

I'm now a Crown Prosecutor. I do a wide range of legal work, including prosecuting jury trials for the Crown. At the end of my degree I felt like there were lots of different pathways open to me. I'm glad that I took the opportunity to practise law and I'm grateful for the experience I've had as a prosecutor. It's not like being in a US crime drama, but it is a fascinating and challenging job where you can make a difference in your community.

My training at the Law Faculty developed a range of skills that I need in my current job: problem-solving, critical thinking and communication skills. Obviously I needed a law degree to be a prosecutor, but it's not the piece of paper that counts, it's the skills I learned at law school that I rely on.

I would encourage anyone thinking about a law degree to keep an open mind about where you want your studies to take you. What you can be sure of is that studying law is a great way of gaining versatile skills that could take you to any corner of the globe!

Erin Carr

Law Clerk
Chapman Tripp

Ko Erin Matariki Carr töku ingoa,
nō Ngāti Awa me Ngai Tūhoe
ahau ā i tipu ake au ki Ōhope,
Whakatāne.

I took my sweet, sweet time studying at Wellington, finally graduating with my Bachelor of Laws with Honours (LLB(Hons)) and a Bachelor of Arts (BA) majoring in Spanish six and a half years later. Though it was long, it was definitely time well spent. I took courses in International Relations and Te Reo Māori; tutored; went on exchange to Mexico; was a member of Ngā Rangahautira and worked as the Kaitakawaenga Ture (Māori Law Students' Coordinator).

It was difficult, of course - tertiary style learning is independent and frequently assessed so it takes a lot of commitment, continual time management and focus to make the most of the opportunities and knowledge offered. For Māori and Pasifika the challenge increases as whānau commitments, language barriers, financial troubles and being a



minority can make dropping out the easiest option when the going gets tough. However, it is important to remember that in another way, study is luxurious. You are allowed to devote the majority of your time to improving yourself and your knowledge, you have time to lay the foundation upon which you will build your future living.

For me, Law and Spanish were a wonderful mix which has opened up career opportunities from private law firms, right across various government departments, to international commercial or political occupations. As a recent graduate, I am trying my hand at corporate law and, in particular, learning about iwi corporate governance with the Te Waka Ture team at Chapman Tripp so that one day I can be useful for my own iwi.

My top tip for incoming students is to keep the bigger picture in mind. Study is an investment in your future: prioritise it and, of course enjoy it.

Zoë Lawton

Legal Researcher and Writer
Victoria University of Wellington and
Bauer Media Group

After four years of feeling slightly lost and unsure whether Law was right for me, I did the undergraduate family law elective which also covered some aspects of medical law. The course really struck a chord with me. Shortly afterward I did an individual research course in the same subjects which involved writing a 'mini thesis' on inter-family tissue and organ donation.

Having finally found my niche, I was hooked. I finished my Bachelor of Laws (LLB), was admitted to the Master of Laws (LLM) programme and completed a dissertation in family and medical law. I learnt how to focus, be disciplined in my time management, undertake thorough research, and write comprehensive and compelling arguments.

With the support of my supervisor I then re-wrote a chapter into an article that was published in the New Zealand Family Law Journal and presented my dissertation at a conference. I also successfully pitched a magazine article to editors which gave me my break into the media industry. I think putting your work into the public arena – and testing out whether it is any good – is a really important aspect of doing an LLM.

After my LLM I landed my dream job as the Research Counsel to the Principal Family Court Judge. After



three years in that role I put in a successful bid for a research grant from the New Zealand Law Foundation to undertake a study which explores a new court system to handle domestic violence cases. I also continue to write articles for mainstream magazines on a range of family law topics which I really enjoy.

Lili Song

Michigan Grotius Research Fellow
University of Michigan Law School

I studied for my PhD in Law at Victoria University of Wellington on a Victoria Doctoral Scholarship. My thesis examines China's law and policy on refugee status.



I first received my Bachelor's and Master's degrees from law schools in Shanghai, China. Out of law school I worked as a non-litigation lawyer in Shanghai, focusing on foreign direct investment, and then as an in-house lawyer and assistant secretariat to the board of directors at an international bank in Shanghai. Although I found being a lawyer could be intellectually exciting and financially rewarding, I soon realised that it was not the kind of job that would make me happy or give me a sense of true satisfaction.

I had had a strong interest in human rights law, an area which was rare for lawyers of my generation in China. A trip to North Korea in 2007 inspired me to research on refugee issues in China.

Coming to Victoria to do my PhD was one of the best decisions I have made. I enjoyed not only excellent academic guidance, but also academic freedom. I attended conferences, interviewed refugees and humanitarian workers in Myanmar, South Korea and China, interned at the United Nations Headquarters, volunteered with the Wellington Refugee Services and travelled to Vanuatu.

By the end of my PhD I realised that researching, getting published and being an academic was what I enjoyed the most. So next I worked as a postdoctoral fellow at the Australian National University. I am currently a Michigan Grotius Research Fellow at the University of Michigan Law School and later this year will take up a role as Lecturer in Law at the University of the South Pacific.

Law is a degree that opens doors to many possibilities and opportunities. Enjoy exploring what makes you happy and go for it!

Claudia Batten

Regional Director North America -
New Zealand Trade and Enterprise
Digital Entrepreneur



We all know from the story of Steve Jobs that the academic route may not be the right path for you. As a young person, finding your own path is more critical than following the prescription of others. Yes, you need to develop tangible skills, but more importantly you need to develop your intuition, voraciously consume information and feed your curiosity and, most important, learn to be resilient.

Personally, I loved academia and studying. Law brought out my innate desire to understand. The Socratic method of teaching meant gaining understanding and insight through questioning and dialogue. At the time, you think you are learning case law, but you are learning how to think. I still find myself thinking in first principles (foundational truths) all the time.

There was so much information we had to consume, the amount of reading we had to do was insane. It's interesting to think how much that one skill has helped me. Being an entrepreneur you are required to have your own view on the future, we build things that don't exist. It's really important you understand multiple disciplines and, in many instances, the unique thing you create sits at the intersection of a diverse range of industries. You want to be smarter, faster and more agile than the next person.

So the questioning that law teaches us is powerful. Law helped me to understand the power in the question, the importance of grey over the rigidity of black and white. Yes, you can argue to get to a definitive decision, but the power comes from exploring the unknown and undefined; to open up rather than narrow down. I find myself still obsessing over an idea: consuming a lot of information, narrowing right down to find some crucial thing no-one else has discovered and then looking to understand and apply it in a broader context.

My career advice is a little unconventional. Most important is to be yourself and follow your own interests. Don't be afraid to be weird and fascinated by unusual things. Rather than looking at things in a prescribed or rigid way, it is your funny quirks and randomness that allow you to be an incredible, interesting person. Competitive advantage comes from being authentic and creative.