

POSITION DESCRIPTION

Head of Commercial Partnerships – Physical AI Research

Reports to:	Director Commercial & Business Partnerships
Division:	DVCR Research Office – Commercial & Business Partnerships
Tenure:	Permanent
Location:	Hamilton
Date:	August 2026

Vision

Ko te tangata

A research-intensive university providing a globally connected, innovative and inclusive studenty experience in an environment characterised by a commitment to diversity, respect for Indigenous knowledge, and high levels of community engagement.

Values

Ko te mana o Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato ka herea ki tō tātou:

- Tū ngātahi me te Māori
- Mahi pono
- Whakanui i ngā huarahi hou
- Whakarewa i te hiringa i te mahara

The University of Waikato places a high value on:

- Partnership with Māori
- Acting with integrity
- Celebrating diversity
- Promoting creativity

1. GENERAL

The Commercial & Business Partnerships division is a strategic function within the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research (DVCR) Office.

As part of its Strategy, the University of Waikato is seeking to significantly grow and diversify its research profile through increased commercial engagement, deeper industry relevance, and scaled external funding. Central to this ambition is the University's substantial investment in Physical AI research — the convergence of artificial intelligence with robotics, autonomous systems, and real-world sensing technologies that can operate reliably in complex, unstructured outdoor environments.

The University is building world-class research capability in Physical AI with a focus on applications across New Zealand's primary industries with global relevance — including horticulture, agriculture, forestry, and aquaculture.

The Commercial Lead – Physical AI Research is a senior role responsible for developing and executing the commercial partnership strategy that will translate this research investment into industry impact, economic value, and sustainable revenue growth.

The role requires a candidate with deep technical credibility in computer science and AI, combined with proven international business development expertise and strong networks across the global robotics, and AI sectors.

2. POSITION PURPOSE

The Commercial Lead – Physical AI Research will:

- Act as commercial enabler between the University's Physical AI research programme and industry partners across the agritech, robotics, autonomous systems, precision agriculture, forestry technology, AI/ML platforms, and deep tech sectors — both domestically and internationally.
- Develop and deliver a commercial revenue plan for Physical AI research, driving sustainable income growth through industry-funded research, large-scale collaborative R&D programmes, technology licensing, spin-out company development, co-funded programmes, and philanthropic/grant co-funding.
- Build, manage, and transition industry relationships into long-term strategic partnerships that align with the University's research strengths and Aotearoa New Zealand's economic priorities.
- Facilitate strategic connections between industry partners and researchers across research themes such as (Robust Outdoor Systems, Agentic Edge AI, Plant and Animal Models, Continual Learning and Adaptation, and Trustworthy and Sovereign AI) and associated technology platforms.
- Champion the translation of research outputs into real-world applications through licensing agreements, spin-out ventures, and collaborative product development pathways.
- Contribute to the broader University innovation ecosystem, including connections to the HIKO Hub innovation precinct and other commercialisation infrastructure.

3. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Industry Partnership Development & Commercial Strategy

- Design and execute a comprehensive commercial strategy for Physical AI research that positions the University as a preferred partner for industry R&D collaboration in outdoor AI, robotics, and autonomous systems.
- Develop and manage a portfolio of strategic industry partnerships across agritech, robotics, autonomous systems, precision agriculture, forestry technology, and AI/ML platform sectors, serving as the programme's primary commercial point of contact and trusted advisor.
- Identify, prospect, and secure partnerships with domestic and international companies, building a pipeline of opportunities from initial engagement through to contracted collaboration.
- Negotiate complex partnership agreements including intellectual property arrangements, licensing terms, co-development agreements, and regulatory/compliance requirements.

- Develop and manage spin-out company pathways, working with researchers and commercialisation teams to identify ventures with global market potential.
- Scan the global landscape for emerging technology trends, competitive intelligence, and market opportunities in Physical AI and adjacent sectors.

Commercial Revenue Growth & Funding Development

- Achieve defined revenue targets through a diversified portfolio of income streams including industry-funded research contracts, large-scale collaborative R&D programmes, technology licensing fees, spin-out equity, co-funded programmes, and strategic grants.
- Develop and maintain a robust pipeline of commercial opportunities, tracked and managed through the University's CRM system.
- Support academic staff in developing commercially viable research proposals, including pricing models, value propositions, and partnership structures.
- Identify and pursue large-scale collaborative R&D programmes with multiple industry partners, leveraging government co-funding mechanisms and international research funding frameworks.
- Facilitate technology licensing opportunities arising from the research programme, working closely with the technology transfer function.

Stakeholder Engagement & International Relationship Management

- Translate industry R&D challenges in primary industries and autonomous systems into collaborative research opportunities that create mutual value.
- Build and maintain international business networks across key markets (including North America, Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Australasia) to identify collaboration partners and market opportunities for Physical AI technologies.
- Represent the University at international conferences, trade missions, and industry forums to promote research capabilities and attract partnership interest.
- Champion engagement with Māori-owned enterprises and iwi organisations, supporting their aspirations in agritech, kaitiakitanga, and data sovereignty.
- Build effective working relationships with internal stakeholders including research theme leaders, the technology transfer office, legal, finance, and executive leadership.

Strategic Planning & Reporting

- Develop and deliver an annual commercial strategy and operational plan for Physical AI partnerships, aligned with the University's research strategy and institutional priorities.
- Track, analyse, and report on key performance metrics including revenue growth, pipeline velocity, partner satisfaction, conversion rates, and spin-out development milestones.
- Provide market intelligence and strategic advice to research leadership on industry trends, partnership opportunities, and competitive positioning in the global Physical AI landscape.
- Contribute to business cases and investment proposals for new research infrastructure, platforms, and capabilities based on industry demand signals.

Team Contribution & Continuous Improvement

- Contribute to the wider Commercial & Business Partnerships team, sharing knowledge, supporting colleagues, and fostering a collaborative, high-performance culture.
- Actively participate in professional development to maintain currency in Physical AI technology trends, commercialisation best practice, and international partnership models.
- Comply with and support the University's Health and Safety policies and procedures, taking reasonable care for your own health and safety and that of others.

- Demonstrate a commitment to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and contribute to an inclusive and culturally safe working environment.

4. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The following performance standards will be used to assess effectiveness in the role:

- Successful development and execution of a comprehensive commercial partnership strategy for Physical AI research, with clear alignment to research themes and institutional priorities.
- Achievement of, or exceeding, defined annual revenue targets across all income streams (industry contracts, licensing, spin-outs, co-funded programmes, and grants).
- Development and maintenance of a strong portfolio of domestic and international industry partnerships, with evidence of deepening engagement over time.
- Effective management of the commercial pipeline with accurate CRM data, regular reporting, and demonstrated pipeline velocity.
- Successful facilitation of spin-out ventures and/or licensing agreements that translate research outputs into market applications.
- Productive and effective internal working relationships with research theme leaders, technology transfer, and University leadership.
- Positive feedback from industry partners on engagement quality, responsiveness, and value creation.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Essential

- A PhD in Computer Science, with a focus on artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics, autonomous systems, or a closely related field.

Desirable

- Additional postgraduate qualifications or professional credentials in business, commercialisation, technology management, or entrepreneurship (e.g., MBA, Graduate Diploma in Business).
- Professional certification in technology transfer, commercialisation, or innovation management.

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE and EXPERIENCE

Essential

- Minimum of 5–10 years of experience in commercial partnerships, business development, technology commercialisation, or strategic account management within the AI, robotics, and/or autonomous systems sectors.
- Demonstrated international experience working across multiple geographies, with established international business networks of potential industry collaboration partners in Physical AI and related sectors.
- Proven track record of securing and managing high-value industry partnerships, with evidence of achieving significant revenue targets.
- Strong technical credibility and the ability to engage at a peer level with world-class AI and robotics researchers on complex technical concepts.
- Experience in technology licensing, spin-out development, and/or large-scale collaborative R&D programme design and execution.
- Demonstrated ability to translate complex research capabilities into compelling commercial value propositions for diverse industry audiences.
- Experience in negotiating complex commercial agreements including IP frameworks, licensing terms, co-development arrangements, and multi-party R&D contracts.
- Strong commercial acumen including proposal development, pricing models, financial analysis, and business case preparation.
- Understanding of research commercialisation pathways, IP strategy, and technology transfer within a university or research institution context.
- Proficiency in CRM systems and pipeline management methodologies.
- A commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and an understanding of Māori data sovereignty principles and their relevance to AI research.

Desirable

- Experience working within or alongside a university research environment or Crown Research Institute.
- Knowledge of New Zealand's primary industries (horticulture, agriculture, forestry, aquaculture) and their technology adoption challenges and opportunities.

- Familiarity with New Zealand and international research funding frameworks, including MBIE programmes, Centres of Research Excellence, and equivalent international mechanisms.
- Experience in building or supporting technology spin-out companies from concept through to investment readiness.
- Networks within the global Physical AI, robotics, or autonomous systems business and research community.

PERSONAL QUALITIES

The successful candidate will demonstrate the following personal qualities:

- Strategic and commercially minded — able to see the big picture while delivering on operational detail. Thinks beyond individual transactions to build long-term value.
- Technically credible — able to engage authentically with world-class researchers and translate deep technical concepts into commercial language for diverse audiences.
- Results-oriented and entrepreneurial — motivated by targets, comfortable with ambiguity, and driven to create new opportunities where none previously existed.
- Internationally oriented — comfortable operating across cultures, time zones, and business environments, with a genuine global perspective.
- Consultative and relationship-focused — builds trust through listening, understanding partner needs, and delivering on commitments.
- Culturally aware and committed to equity — understands and respects Te Ao Māori, tikanga, and the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in a research and commercialisation context.
- Collaborative team player — works effectively across organisational boundaries, supports colleagues, and contributes to a positive team culture.
- Adaptable and resilient — thrives in a dynamic environment, manages competing priorities, and maintains composure under pressure.
- Highly developed communication skills — able to present compellingly to senior industry executives, academic leaders, and governance bodies alike.

August 2026