

POSITION DESCRIPTION

Legal Counsel

Reports to:	General Counsel
Division:	Office of the General Counsel
Tenure:	Fixed Term - Nine (9) Months
Location:	Hamilton Campus
Date:	September 2026

Vision

Ko te tangata

A research-intensive university providing a globally connected, innovative and inclusive student 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

Legal is responsible for providing legal advice and services to Council, the Office of the Vice Chancellor, the Executive Committee, the Senior Leadership Team and staff of the University of Waikato.

2. POSITION PURPOSE

The Legal Counsel provides high quality, practical legal advice and services across the University's operations. The role supports the General Counsel and Senior Legal Counsel in managing a broad and expanding legal portfolio, with a particular focus on commercial contracting, official information and privacy compliance, and support for major University initiatives including the development of the medical school.

The appointee will be an experienced practitioner able to manage files independently from day one, exercise sound judgement on risk and escalation, and deliver advice that is accurate, timely and workable for non-lawyer clients.

3. FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Internal:

- General Counsel, Senior Legal Counsel and Junior Legal Counsel
- Senior leadership and divisional managers
- Academic and professional staff across the University

External:

- External legal counsel
- Office of the Ombudsman and Office of the Privacy Commissioner
- Contracting parties, funders and other external stakeholders

4. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

Commercial and contracting

- Draft, review and negotiate a broad range of agreements, including services and procurement contracts, research and funding agreements, memoranda of understanding, licences and confidentiality agreements.
- Provide practical advice on contract risk, term negotiation and contract management issues to internal clients.
- Support legal aspects of major projects, including property, construction and development matters associated with the medical school programme.

Official information and privacy

- Prepare and review responses to requests under the Official Information Act 1982, including the application of withholding grounds and consultation requirements.
- Prepare and review responses to requests and complaints under the Privacy Act 2020, including access requests and the application of withholding grounds.
- Support the University's engagement with the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner.

General legal services

- Provide advice on education, commercial and regulatory matters, including support for staff and student investigations and complaints processes.
- Manage matters in consultation with the General Counsel or Senior Legal Counsel, escalating to external counsel where required and within agreed parameters.
- Contribute to legal compliance training and guidance materials for University staff.
- Maintain accurate records and precedents and contribute to the continuous improvement of the legal team's systems and processes.

Team Contribution

- Work effectively as a member of the Legal and the wider Corporate Services Group to support other team members and provide support and/or coverage of functions.
- Work collaboratively to encourage transparency across activities, open sharing of knowledge, and the building of positive relationships to support a high-performance culture.
- Work with other team members on projects.
- Support a positive culture and morale.

- Comply with and undertake responsibilities set out in the University's Health and Safety Policy.

5. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The Legal Counsel will be performing satisfactorily when:

- Legal advice is accurate, timely, practical and aligned with the University's strategic objectives, policies and risk appetite.
- Contracts, information requests, investigations and other matters are managed effectively and within agreed timeframes.
- Legal and regulatory risks are identified early, clearly communicated and appropriately escalated.
- Interactions with colleagues, clients and external parties are professional, respectful, constructive and collaborative.
- The Legal Counsel contributes effectively to team meetings, projects and shared priorities, supporting a positive and collegial Legal team environment.
- Matters are managed with appropriate confidentiality, professional judgment and integrity.
- University policies, procedures and safe and healthy work practices are followed, including relevant statutory and professional obligations.
- The Legal Counsel contributes to continuous improvement, including sharing knowledge, developing precedents and improving Legal team processes and resources.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Essential

- An LLB or law degree from a recognised university.
- Admission as a Barrister and Solicitor of the High Court of New Zealand and eligibility to hold a current practising certificate.
- The appointee must be eligible to hold a current New Zealand practising certificate.

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE and EXPERIENCE

Essential

- 5 - 7 years post-qualification experience, gained in private practice, in-house, the public sector, tertiary education or another regulated environment, or a combination of these.
- Demonstrated experience in commercial contracting, including drafting and negotiating a variety of agreement types.
- Exposure to property, construction or major projects work is an advantage.

Preferred

- Experience with the Official Information Act 1982 and the Privacy Act 2020 processes and investigations is an advantage.

PERSONAL QUALITIES

- Ability to manage files autonomously from instruction through to completion, with sound judgement about what to resolve, what to escalate and when to recommend external advice.
- Strong plain language drafting skills and the ability to give clear, practical advice to non-lawyer clients.
- Ability to manage a high volume and varied workload with competing priorities and internal clients.
- Sound understanding of, or the ability to quickly develop familiarity with, the public sector and tertiary education context, including the Education and Training Act 2020.
- Commitment to the University's obligations in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and the ability to apply Te Tiriti considerations in legal advice where relevant.
- Discretion, integrity and sound judgement in handling sensitive and confidential matters.
- A collegial working style and willingness to contribute to a small, busy team.

September 2026