

UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO
QTĀKOU WHĀKAIHU WAKA
FACULTY OF LAW

ALUMNI PROFILES

Ture Ararau

Pathways in Law

Otago law graduates on where their law degree has taken them, and the advice they would give students today.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

Foreword

Ture Ararau | Pathways in Law speaker series responds to our students' curiosity about the many possibilities a law degree might open to them. Our alumni and the profession have generously and enthusiastically responded to that curiosity by sharing their experiences through the speaker series. Building on this energy from our students and alumni, we decided to create a resource bringing together short profiles of alumni who have followed different pathways with their law degrees.

While the profiles within this publication capture only a small section of the possibilities a law degree provides, we hope it will be food for thought and inspiration for our students. It will also be of interest to our alumni as it shares stories of where their colleagues' pathways have taken them.

Thank you to all of those who have contributed to this publication and to our speaker series. We are very grateful to all of our alumni for their consistent willingness to give back to our students and Faculty in myriad ways.

Ngā mihi nui

Dean Bridgette Toy-Cronin

Faculty of Law

TE KAUPĒKA TĀTAI TURE · UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO

CONTENTS

Our Alumni

01 Climate, Environment & Kaupapa Māori

Tessa Vincent	01
Georgina Beasley	02
Renata Davis	03
Alice Bateman	04

02 International Law & Human Rights

Olivia Klinkum	05
Katarina Schwarz	06
Nera Tautau	07
Jonathan Rowe	08

03 Public Law & Policy

Steven Sutton	09
Kate Wevers	10
Edward Bowie	11

Our Alumni

04 Commercial Law, Finance & In-house

Kelly McAuslan	12
Philippa Poole	13
Laura Manson	14
Tom Jemson	15
Emma von Veh	16

05 Academia & Litigation

Oliver Hailes	17
Alice Osman	18
James Tocher	19

06 Criminal & Family

Jazmine Cassidy	20
Steven Lack	21
Richard Smith	22

01

SECTION 01

Climate, Environment & Kaupapa Māori

Alumni working where law meets the climate, te taiao and kaupapa Māori.

Tessa Vincent

INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE COUNCILS NETWORK

Georgina Beasley

NET ZERO LAWYERS ALLIANCE

Renata Davis

KĀHUI LEGAL

Alice Bateman

TE RŪNANGA O NGĀI TAHU



01 CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT &
KAUPAPA MĀORI

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2016

Tessa Vincent

Ngāti Apa

Capacity Building Manager

INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE COUNCILS NETWORK
LONDON

CLIMATE POLICY

PUBLIC POLICY

NGO

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I live in London and work for the International Climate Councils Network, supporting expert climate bodies in their advice to governments around the world. I moved here 4+ years ago to complete a Masters in Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government in Oxford, which enabled me to enter international climate policy work. During the last two years, I have also edited a book alongside 30 New Zealanders on climate solutions in Aotearoa. The book, *Kiwis in Climate*, puts forward a hopeful vision for New Zealand to lead on climate change, and Professor Jacinta Ruru, my previous law professor, is a contributing author!

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

I love the metaphor of a career being a 'jungle gym' rather than a 'ladder'. When I was at law school, I was unaware of the many career pathways that exist, especially in the government and policy realm. While students may go into legal practice, we also need students with legal skills to enter the fascinating space of reforming the law: what policies do we need to tackle our biggest issues, like climate change and social inequality? Retaining flexibility, following your passions and being open to multiple career paths is something I strongly recommend for Otago law students.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

Generally, my career decisions have been motivated by the community initiatives I have been involved in. I worked on food waste reduction in New Zealand for 2+ years and set up the Aotearoa Food Rescue Alliance as a result of volunteering for the Wellington food rescue charity Kaibosh. Being involved in *Kiwis in Climate* has similarly complemented my day job, allowing for a blend of big-picture international climate policy and on-the-ground New Zealand climate solutions. You can use your precious time in work to contribute to areas you care about, and legal skills can help you get there.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

I have previously worked across multiple part-time roles and often carve out time for voluntary work. My 4.5-day working week has meant I have had the flexibility to write the *Kiwis in Climate* book, which I would not have been able to do in a more rigid workplace. Post-Covid, workplaces are more open to flexible working, and I would encourage you to think about how your future careers might enable your different interests and motivations to flourish!

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

The University of Otago is a special place. I first learnt there the importance of work-life balance, and maintain amazing friendships to this day. Through a law degree, I learnt how to condense a lot of information into key points, and how to quickly read materials. In this age of information, navigating what is important (and true) within a large amount of material is essential. The connection between studying law and policy was not obvious to me in 2011, but having advised Members of Parliament in 2018 and 2019, I can tell you these skills are essential if you ever want to go into politics or policy.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Firstly, stay open and get involved in university or community initiatives that interest you. Ignite Consultants and the Community Law Centre were two programmes that shaped my career trajectory and made me realise there are exciting options out there. Secondly, consider using your legal skills as a leader in the NGO sphere, politics or policy. We need amazing law graduates in these spaces!



02 CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT &
KAUPAPA MĀORI

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2015

Georgina Beasley

Chief Executive Officer

NET ZERO LAWYERS ALLIANCE
LONDON

CLIMATE LAW

NET ZERO

SYSTEMS CHANGE

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I lead the secretariat at the Net Zero Lawyers Alliance. We work with some of the world's largest commercial law firms to identify and remove legal barriers to the transition to net zero emissions. Essentially, we work to bring Article 2.1(c) of the Paris Agreement to life by making financial flows consistent with low-emissions, climate-resilient development. The law touches every part of the systems we're trying to transition. Our job is to look across all legal practice areas, find the burning platforms, and help create the enabling environment for net zero.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

Absolutely a surprise! I stayed open to opportunities and didn't opt into the 'you've got to do X if you want to do Y' narrative. I went from private practice into government, where I worked on domestic climate strategy and international negotiations, then was seconded to Parliament. After moving to the UK and more climate policy and study, the opportunity arose to lead the NZLA, and it felt like the perfect convergence of my training, passion and belief that lawyers have an underused role in driving systemic change. I remember our international environmental law class at Otago being tiny. I never imagined it would become the defining feature of my career. The field you end up shaping might not exist yet either. That should be exciting!

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

He tangata. Climate change can only be solved by the people, for the people. I'm motivated by the power of individuals to start collective movements. Climate change is a hugely complex issue, and no single profession, sector, city or country will solve it. But if just one person is bold and brave and brings the right people together, they can have a ripple effect leading to transformational solutions.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

Every week is very different. It might involve drafting briefs and project plans, meeting with law firms, governments or NGOs across different jurisdictions, fundraising, hosting an event, and working through a communications strategy. One hour I might be deep in investment treaty reform, the next thinking about permissible boundaries for climate collaboration within competition law. I love the diversity and the need for pragmatism, agility and creativity.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

My work requires me to navigate different areas of law and climate. I'm rarely the expert, but I need to understand each field well enough to work alongside the people who are, and to identify key issues and solutions. I'm grateful I took a real range of papers at Otago, including those that may have seemed niche but that got me excited and taught me to really think. And second year gave me some stamina, if you can get through second year, you can get through some stressful professional moments!

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

There are so many challenges, both political and practical, that make protecting our people and planet incredibly difficult. Your expertise and your passion are desperately needed. Be sure of your 'why'. Let that drive you. Stay strong, remain optimistic, work hard, be kind, (sit down), be humble.



Renata Davis

Ngāi Tahu, Kāti Māmoe, Waitaha, Moriori

Corporate & Commercial Lawyer

KĀHUI LEGAL

TE WHANGANUI-A-TARA / ŌTAUTAHU

COMMERCIAL

KAUPAPA MĀORI

CARBON & ENERGY

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

Our firm, Kāhui Legal, works with iwi, hapū and Māori landowners to navigate their aspirations on various kaupapa. My mahi focuses on corporate, commercial and commercial property, with a particular interest in forestry, carbon markets and the energy sector. I'm privileged to serve on the board of Whai Rawa, the Kāi Tahu savings and investment scheme. Most importantly, I'm a husband to Kate and a pāpā to two young tamariki.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

Looking back to my undergraduate years, I would never have predicted the career pathway I've followed. After Otago I joined a regional firm in Murihiku as a civil litigator. I then shifted to Ōtautahi to complete postgraduate study (LLM) and to work part-time for Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu in their strategy team. That led to a corporate/property role at Bell Gully. Around when my son was born, an opportunity arose to join the commercial team at Kāhui Legal, somewhat of a dream role!

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

The pull towards a firm advancing Māori development and kaupapa Māori was probably in my DNA. I grew up in a Ngāi Tahu household with a tāua and pōua strongly involved with the iwi. We are also connected to our mahika kai practices of gathering tītī. What I love about Kāhui Legal is that all our people are connected to their Māori communities and are striving to propel those communities forward. We are committed to assisting Māori entities to grow and manage their assets so they can achieve their moemoeā, on their own terms.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

My wife and I have two tamariki under five, so life is beautifully chaotic at the moment. Workwise, every week is different. There is usually a mixture of client calls, contract reviews and negotiations. Some weeks I have board commitments or client hui, which can bring me down to Ōtautahi or all around the North Island.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

My time at Otago provided a strong foundation. While the course mahi was important for developing analysis and critical thinking, the whakawhanaungatanga provided by Te Rōpū Whai Pūtake was equally, if not more, important. He mihi nunui ki a Jacinta Ruru i tāna tautoko ki a mātou. I note the curriculum has since been extended to cover tikanga Māori, the first laws of this land, which gives hope that the next generation of lawyers will have a stronger understanding of our nation's society and history.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Know yourself: go out of your way to learn where you are from. Get 'good': becoming the best practitioner you can be takes time, take every opportunity to learn. Create your own luck by relentlessly pursuing your goals. And don't underestimate the importance of 'soft' skills.



04 CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT &
KAUPAPA MĀORI

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2017

Alice Bateman

Ngāi Tahu

In-house Employment Lawyer & Strategic HR Lead

TE RŪNANGA O NGĀI TAHU

TE WAIPOUNAMU

EMPLOYMENT LAW

KAUPAPA MĀORI

IN-HOUSE

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I'm an in-house employment lawyer at Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, where I also lead our strategic HR function. In plain terms: I build the frameworks and initiatives that help our kaimahi thrive, and when things get tricky in the workplace, I support leaders to navigate that. I'm also a Consultant with Dundas Street Employment Lawyers, so I get the best of both worlds, in-house with private mahi.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

I started in private practice at the Crown Solicitor's office in Invercargill and was convinced I would be a criminal lawyer. Almost immediately, my boss Mary-Jane Thomas pulled me aside and said: 'You're not a criminal lawyer, you're an employment lawyer.' To this day I don't know how, but she was absolutely right, and I specialised pretty quickly from there. Coming back to work for my iwi was always the goal; it was just a matter of when.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

Building Ngāi Tahu talent and helping our entities be the best they can be. What makes this role genuinely unlike anything else is the intergenerational focus, every decision carries weight beyond the immediate moment, and I find that endlessly meaningful.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

Honestly? There's no such thing as typical. One day might be back-to-back meetings; the next, a full day of mediation; the next, deep in building a new framework at my desk. I genuinely cannot predict what any given day will look like, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

Immensely. I know 'learning to write well' sounds boring, but the ability to critically analyse every word and build an argument from nothing is something I use every single day. Making the most of practical opportunities like mooting and client interviewing is such a great chance to practise active listening and thinking on your feet, these matter more than you think. But honestly, the most valuable thing I've taken from Otago and the Law Faculty is the people. The connections you make will support you through the years to come.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Do it. There is never a dull day in HR or employment law, people are fascinating, and the work is a genuine mix of creative, positive initiatives and complex, challenging disputes. I always encourage getting experience in a law firm first if you can, to really enhance your kete of skills. If you care about people and want work that truly means something, this is a great place to land.

02

SECTION 02

International Law & Human Rights

Advocates and advisers whose work crosses borders and defends fundamental rights.

Olivia Klinkum

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE

Katarina Schwarz

UNITED NATIONS · UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

Nera Tautau

TE KĀHUI TIKA TANGATA · NZ HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Jonathan Rowe

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE



Olivia Klinkum

International Legal Adviser

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

INTERNATIONAL TRADE LAW

DIPLOMACY

LITIGATION

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I'm an international legal adviser at the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT). My current area of specialty is international trade law. This role involves negotiating free trade agreements between New Zealand and other countries, representing New Zealand in international litigation when we have a trade law dispute, and providing legal advice on the consistency of domestic policy proposals with international trade rules.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

My career path has included several roles and opportunities I could not have anticipated. After graduating, I worked as a Judge's Clerk in the Court of Appeal and then in litigation at Meredith Connell. In 2021 I studied a Master of Laws at Harvard, then applied for the Visiting Professionals Programme at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. This allowed me to spend a year at the ICC, where my interests in litigation, international law and criminal justice converged. In The Hague I connected with the New Zealand Embassy, which reinforced my longstanding interest in working for MFAT and led to my current position.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

The intersection of the law, geopolitical issues and diplomacy drew me to this work. Representing New Zealand and advocating for our interests internationally is rewarding and intellectually challenging, particularly at a time when the international rules-based order is under significant pressure. Contributing to work that strengthens the legal rules and frameworks New Zealand relies on motivates me.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

My weeks are varied, which I enjoy. I might be providing legal advice to different government departments on the consistency of a policy proposal with international trade rules, drafting a submission for ministers, or engaging with lawyers from other countries in meetings and negotiations. I also work with other MFAT legal teams on environmental and human-rights-related issues.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

I have a lot to thank Otago for. The courses I took in Criminal Justice, the International Criminal Court, and International Trade Law sparked my interest in the areas I then worked in. I still rely on fundamental skills like statutory interpretation and case law analysis. The legal competitions I nervously signed up for developed my advocacy abilities, which gave me the confidence to present submissions in court as a junior lawyer, and to lead negotiations now. And my lecturers and friends from Otago consistently encouraged me to apply for opportunities I thought were out of my reach.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

The pathway to international law is not as well defined as other types of practice, which can feel daunting, but it also means you have greater flexibility and can accumulate a range of interesting experiences. Getting a good grounding in the basics of being a practising lawyer, whether in private practice or the public service, is invaluable. Take advantage of the opportunities at Otago to develop your practical legal skills, and reach out to people in areas you're interested in.



06 INTERNATIONAL LAW & HUMAN RIGHTS

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2016

Katarina Schwarz

UN Special Rapporteur · Associate Professor

UNITED NATIONS · UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM
NOTTINGHAM, UNITED KINGDOM

HUMAN RIGHTS

ANTI-SLAVERY

ACADEMIA

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I currently serve as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, and as an Associate Professor in the School of Law at the University of Nottingham. Special Rapporteurs are independent human rights experts appointed to report and advise on key human rights issues. In this role I conduct country visits to monitor the situation of slavery and trafficking, act on reported cases of violations, engage in advocacy, and provide advice for technical cooperation. I also lead a team of researchers in the Rights Lab working to advance the evidence base for tackling modern slavery and human trafficking. All this work supports the goal of helping to eradicate slavery and trafficking around the world.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

At a fairly young age I knew I wanted to work on human rights and humanitarian issues. But I didn't have a clear path in mind, and it wasn't until my honours dissertation at Otago that I started working on slavery specifically. For me, everything built from there. Based on my honours dissertation, I was invited to undertake a PhD in the UK, which was definitely a surprise, and transitioned from that to an academic job in the Rights Lab. I found my calling in the antislavery field, as well as genuine enjoyment in research and collaboration. Everything else flows from that passion.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

The chance to make a real difference in people's lives. There are so many big challenges in the world today, and it can be easy to feel overwhelmed. But when you see survivors of trafficking empowered to build new lives, and leading change from the frontlines, it reminds you that the work really matters. And getting to do that with a community of so many passionate people around the world is truly rewarding.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

One week can look very different to the next. I might be convening workshops with governments and civil society in Indonesia or Uganda, meeting with survivors in the Philippines or Romania, coordinating teams collecting data on the ground in Peru or South Africa, or presenting to high-level international actors in Geneva or New York. In other weeks I'm holed up in my office analysing data and reports to make sure we have the best possible picture of the situation. The variety is a big part of what makes the work so engaging.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

Legal research is still at the heart of my work. You can't do this work without a rigorous understanding of the legal norms and principles at play, law is really central to the fight against slavery and trafficking. The breadth of knowledge of different areas of law developed in my degree also continues to serve me well, as slavery and trafficking cut across a lot of other issues and legal regimes.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Three key things. First, protect the quality of your work, including the principles underpinning it, it's not just luck, but preparation, diligence and attitude. Second, hold onto hope and persevere; this is not always an easy field to get into, and the work itself can be demanding. To make the long game, you need to keep that flame burning. Third, it is absolutely worth it. There is no substitute for working every day in a career that genuinely makes a difference in people's lives.



07 INTERNATIONAL LAW & HUMAN RIGHTS

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2020

Nera Tautau

Malaemalu, Moata'a

Senior Human Rights Advisor

TE KĀHUI TIKA TANGATA · NZ HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

HUMAN RIGHTS

RACE RELATIONS

POLICY

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I'm a Senior Human Rights Advisor at Te Kāhui Tika Tangata, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission. My work is focused on race relations, so I work on a range of human rights issues that impact Pacific, ethnic, migrant, religious and faith, refugee and asylum seeker communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

Human rights wasn't on my radar when I finished law school. After I graduated I was working as a policy advisor at the Ministry of Justice, and while I did a little human rights analysis in my work, it wasn't my primary focus. Through that job I made connections with people working at the Human Rights Commission, which led to a secondment opportunity. I ended up loving human rights work, so I stayed at the Commission, and have been there for the past five years.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

I believe human rights are a powerful tool to empower individuals and communities to enact change. Through my work I've seen the very real and positive impact human rights has made to people's lives, both at a systemic level and at an individual, everyday level. I'm motivated because the work is aligned with my values, community-focused, strengths-based, complex and interesting. It makes for a challenging but very rewarding job!

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

It's an office job, so a mix of internal meetings, stakeholder engagements and desk time for project work, drafting, reviewing and researching. I also get invited to attend or speak at various community events, which is one of my favourite parts of the job. My current role involves juggling a lot of small to medium-sized pieces of work, rather than focusing on a couple of big, in-depth pieces like I did in policy.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

Law school provided me with strong research, analysis and writing skills. Participating in law competitions and being involved with the Pacific Island Law Students' Association was helpful for strengthening my public speaking, presenting and networking skills. Having a legal background has also been useful for select committee submissions and international human rights work.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Academically, any human rights-related papers are useful for building a solid foundation. Strong research and writing skills are invaluable in any role, so any opportunity to hone these is also useful. Outside of uni, looking for volunteer, internship or work experience related to human rights is equally valuable, volunteering at community law, getting involved with student associations or UN Youth, or undertaking internships with NGOs like Amnesty International.



Jonathan Rowe

*Deputy Director, Defence Legal Services
(Personnel)*

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

MILITARY LAW

PUBLIC LAW

LITIGATION

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I am the Deputy Director of Defence Legal Services (Personnel), which means I lead the people and litigation team for the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF). This involves advising Command on anything relating to the NZDF's approximately 12,000 uniformed personnel, on investigations and inquiries, the NZDF Health Directorate on health law relevant to the NZDF, the NZDF Military Police on criminal investigations, and Veterans' Affairs on support to New Zealand's veteran community.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

I ended up as a lawyer in the NZDF after hearing the experiences of some of my friends from law school who had joined the NZDF before me. Their description of the variety of work, the travel, and the camaraderie made NZDF sound like such an exciting place to work. On the way to being Deputy Director of Defence Legal (Personnel) I have been a legal advisor in various locations around New Zealand, the Assistant Director of Military Prosecutions, and the Chief Legal Advisor at NZDF's operational headquarters. I have also deployed operationally to Antarctica, and areas in the Pacific, Asia and the Middle East.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

I am motivated by my team's "why", which is to enable the NZDF to be a credible, deployable, combat capable force with mana, by anticipating legal risk and getting ahead of legal issues. This flows through to a sense that my team and I are able to provide meaningful advice, on a broad range of areas from health, to criminal, and public law, that has real world consequences.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

No two weeks are ever the same. However, my weeks will often involve coaching and mentoring members of my team, interacting with and advising senior commanders, advising parliamentary select committees, fitness (I make a point of finding time in my day to get out for a run or gym), and delivering training or briefings.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

The ability to think outside the box, to be resilient, to adapt to change, to work effectively with a diverse team, and, perhaps most importantly, to be influential are skills that I gained at Otago and are highly relevant to my daily practice.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

I would advise a student considering a career as a lawyer in the NZDF to study hard, but to ensure they balance study with building networks and relationships, and maintaining extracurricular involvement. Most important perhaps, I would encourage anyone looking for a career less ordinary to give NZDF a go.

03

SECTION 03

Public Law & Policy

Lawyers shaping government decisions, public policy and the work of the state.

Steven Sutton

TE PUNI KŌKIRI · MINISTRY OF MĀORI DEVELOPMENT

Kate Wevers

CROWN LAW OFFICE

Edward Bowie

FGS GLOBAL



09 PUBLIC LAW & POLICY

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2008

Steven Sutton

Deputy Secretary (Deputy Chief Executive)

TE PUNI KŌKIRI · MINISTRY OF MĀORI DEVELOPMENT

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

PUBLIC SERVICE

POLICY

LEADERSHIP

Steven Sutton is a Deputy Chief Executive in the New Zealand public service. He studied law and history at the University of Otago, where he also served as President of the Otago University Students' Association. He later completed a master's degree in history at the University of Cambridge.

The chance to make a tangible difference on complex issues that shape the country inspires me in my public service work. It is all about creating public value. As a Deputy Secretary (Deputy Chief Executive) at Te Puni Kōkiri | Ministry of Māori Development, my executive leadership team colleagues and I lead policy advice to the Government on Māori development and iwi, and Māori relations with the Crown. Day-to-day, I lead a team of more than 100 staff and oversee an annual budget of about \$200 million. While no two weeks feel the same, a typical week involves meeting with my Minister, the Secretary for Māori Development (Chief Executive), and senior colleagues across departments, all the while making sure people and resources are in the right place and weighing risks and opportunities to make decisions with the best available information. It is demanding. That is what makes it interesting.

Each step in my career has been fascinating. The steps have built deliberately from technical specialist roles to more generalist leadership roles.

After Otago, I followed a well-trodden path and started as a graduate in a large commercial law firm. I enjoyed the work, and I have returned to private practice at that firm a couple of times. Working in a firm laid a great foundation, especially

discipline, attention to detail, and business development. After postgraduate study overseas, I moved into public service, first in legal roles as the constitutional advisor at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (in the Beehive), and then at the Ministry for Primary Industries. Those roles exposed me to how decision making works in executive government.

My legal work at the Ministry for Primary Industries turned into a five-year overseas trade posting, working as a diplomat at the New Zealand Embassy in China. I focused on the regulatory side of agricultural trade with our largest export market, which meant working across cultures, navigating complex systems, and seeing New Zealand's interests from an international perspective. I also learnt Chinese for the job.

In a career most people face a choice about whether to stay in a specialist track or move towards broader leadership. I chose leading teams and functions. The earlier technical legal and trade roles were still important because they gave me the grounding to step into leadership with confidence.

Otago played the decisive role in setting me up professionally and personally. Studying law gave me a way of thinking that endures in my decisions today. How to deconstruct problems, test assumptions, assemble evidence, and analyse consequences. The unique Otago student experience was just as important. It built friendships, resilience, and early leadership experience, all of which have lasted and matter just as much as my degrees.



Kate Wevers

Legal Team Manager

CROWN LAW OFFICE

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

PUBLIC LAW

GOVERNMENT

LITIGATION

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I manage one of the public law teams at Crown Law. We give legal advice to government (departments, ministries, and ministers) on a wide range of issues, and we also represent the Government in litigation. My team focuses on natural resources and environmental issues, for example climate change, resource management, conservation, transport, land and water.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

When I left law school I wanted to be a litigator. I spent 12 years in private practice litigation in New Zealand and London. I didn't think I would end up working for Government. I moved to Crown Law about seven years ago for a few reasons; partly because I wanted to focus more on public law and Crown Law is the best place for that.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

There's lots of opportunity in the public sector to make a difference, and that can be very rewarding. It's also exciting to work on significant issues that are in the news. Government touches all parts of the economy and society, so there is extraordinary variety in what we do. And the people: Crown Law is a very collegial and supportive place to work and we have a lot of fun together, even when the work is stressful.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

It depends. A lot of our work is reactive. We support ministers and departments with legal advice on issues that are often urgent or fast-moving. In civil litigation the Crown is mostly a defendant rather than a plaintiff, and new proceedings frequently land on our desks out of the blue. So I often arrive at work thinking I'm going to spend the day on one thing only to get immediately pulled away to deal with something else. In the run-up to hearings, I will be intensively preparing for court, liaising with the other side and the court, prepping arguments and reviewing documents and so forth. As team manager I also spend a fair amount of time on people management and organisational leadership, or troubleshooting challenging matters that the team is dealing with.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

The core skills of legal method that I learned at Otago are relevant every day; how to read and understand legislation and case law and develop persuasive legal arguments.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

It's difficult (although not impossible) to transition into litigation later in your career. So if you think you might be interested in litigation it's worth getting some litigation experience while you're still reasonably junior. Other than that, just do what you're interested in. The legal profession is fairly flexible and people shift focus all the time. Don't be too fixed in your plans; look out for new opportunities, particularly if they're a bit surprising or scary. Those are the experiences that teach you the most.



Edward Bowie

Director

FGS GLOBAL
LONDON

PUBLIC POLICY

REGULATION

POLITICS

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I work with organisations on their public policy challenges, helping them understand how a policy might, or already does, impact them, and designing alternative policy and strategies in response. A lot of that work involves legal skills, including research, drafting and understanding the legislative process. I also work with clients engaged in litigation or subject to regulatory scrutiny, in particular merger review processes, to help shape the environment outside the courtroom, so that customers, employees, shareholders, politicians, media and others understand why something is happening. Nowadays, alongside a strong legal strategy, there are other non-legal factors that influence how an organisation goes about its work.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

This wasn't a surprise to anybody who knew me growing up, I've been a political nerd since day one. I also worked for a while in the Beehive, so this blend of law, politics and regulation fits me well. For me, law was always a launch pad, it's such a good basis for key skills that can be used elsewhere, and so after a few years in practice, I knew it was time to take those skills into a new domain.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

It's the fascination of being thrown into the detail of new sectors of the economy every day, and having to get up to speed on their regulatory, legal and political environment. My work requires a wide understanding of the factors at play for a client: it's not just legal, or economic, or political, or the media interests, it's all of them together. I like learning about those features in different contexts. It keeps things interesting and varied.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

It will usually involve guiding a client through a substantive step of legislative reform, a stage in the parliamentary process, submitting to a consultation, or receiving correspondence from government. It will also involve a big moment in litigation or a regulatory procedure: for example, handling receipt of the competition regulator's findings into a proposed merger, and thinking about what that means for my client's different stakeholders.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

The skills I picked up in my law degree at Otago are crucial to me being able to do my job well now. A lot of my work is legal in basis, and a lot of it is done with lawyers, but not in practice. Reading and scrutinising documents, understanding what's really being said (or is not being said), and crafting arguments on your client's behalf are all legal skills which I now use in this different context.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Try to think as broadly as possible about the challenges and questions being asked of you. Being accurate and precise is important, particularly in legal advice, but more often than not people will value someone bringing a wider perspective: why is this client even facing this challenge? What's the long-term solution? Are others in the sector facing the same issues? Reading widely, and different newspapers and political views across the spectrum every day, will help develop that skillset, which in turn helps open up a pathway into this sort of work.

04

SECTION 04

Commercial Law, Finance & In-house

Law graduates working in, for and with businesses

Kelly McAuslan

HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORT NZ

Philippa Poole

REVOLUT

Laura Manson

ALTERED CAPITAL

Tom Jemson

CHAPMAN TRIPP

Emma von Veh

BUDDLE FINDLAY



12 COMMERCIAL LAW, FINANCE &
IN-HOUSE

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2014

Kelly McAuslan

Senior Legal Counsel

HIGH PERFORMANCE SPORT NZ

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

IN-HOUSE

SPORT

COMMERCIAL

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I'm a Senior Legal Counsel at High Performance Sport NZ (HPSNZ). As an in-house lawyer, I provide advice exclusively to HPSNZ, which is different to practising at a law firm where I'd advise many clients. I work closely with internal teams to manage risk and support the organisation to achieve its goal of empowering Kiwi athletes to succeed on the world stage.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

I started in private practice at a small firm specialising in IP, media and technology. After a secondment to Lion Breweries in my second year, I knew I wanted to end up in-house eventually. I loved seeing how legal advice directly impacted the business and seeing projects right through. When I made the move to London for my OE, I was drawn to in-house roles in industries that interested me. I ended up at the Financial Times and later at Arsenal Football Club during the COVID-19 pandemic, that part was certainly a surprise! Upon returning to New Zealand, the skills I'd gained overseas set me up well to find roles in financial services, and then to return to the sport sector.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

I love the problem-solving aspect of being a lawyer. A common misconception is that legal teams exist to create paperwork or act as a 'barrier' to progress. Instead, my role is to help my colleagues achieve their objectives in a way that minimises risk. I enjoy explaining legal concepts in a way that can be easily understood and applied, so I'm seen as a strategic business partner who adds real value rather than an unnecessary compliance check.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

There is no 'typical' week, which can be both challenging and exciting! One day I'm negotiating a contract for a new piece of technology to train athletes, the next I'm focused on governance, privacy, or health and safety. Last week involved a full staff hui where we heard from colleagues supporting athletes at the Commonwealth Games, and an update on how our athletes are tracking toward the LA2028 Olympics. It gives real purpose to the work we do behind the scenes!

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

My law degree taught me to think critically, as well as interpretation skills, which have been useful in every role. The culture at Otago also encouraged us to look beyond the books and prioritise connecting with peers and building relationships. This has proved hugely important: being an effective lawyer requires connecting with people and being approachable, so your colleagues actually want to involve you in their mahi. If you build genuine rapport across the business, you'll be involved earlier and deliver the most impact.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Be curious and embrace opportunities that interest you, but be intentional about building your 'legal toolkit'. If you want to end up in-house, I'd recommend gaining experience in the practice areas that arise in most roles, commercial contracts, IP, and privacy/data protection. If you're starting in private practice, this broad experience is often best gained at a smaller firm where you'll get real variety. These skills are highly transferable and a strong foundation for an in-house career.



13 COMMERCIAL LAW, FINANCE &
IN-HOUSE

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2014

Philippa Poole

Lead, Commercial Legal

REVOLUT

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

IN-HOUSE

FINTECH

COMMERCIAL

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I lead the Commercial Legal team at Revolut. Revolut is a global financial superapp, we're aiming to simplify all things money. We offer frictionless, beautifully designed products that help you spend, save, invest, borrow and manage your lifestyle. Download our app and you'll see what I'm talking about!

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

After completing my LLB and BCom (Finance) at Otago, I started at Russell McVeagh. A secondment to Meridian Energy made me realise I loved the in-house environment, so I joined their legal team. A few years later, the inevitable pull of the 'OE' saw me land in London, looking for an in-house role at a startup or scale-up. That's when I found Revolut. When I joined in 2019, we had 3 million customers and a legal team of six. Seven years later, we have over 75 million customers and our legal function is over 220 people. Looking back, this path isn't a total surprise. I've always been drawn to commerce, and an in-house role gives you a unique opportunity to work end-to-end across a business and truly understand how it operates.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

I love the variety and speed of my work, no two quarters feel the same. It's incredibly satisfying to work closely with teams from across the business on a new product and then watch it go live and be used by millions in the real world. I also enjoy working in complex industries like energy and finance where the problems you are trying to solve are difficult and actually impact everyday people.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

I review and advise on any major commercial deals that are being negotiated. This can range from our F1 sponsorship deal, which saw us become title partner to the new Audi F1 team, to our Google Cloud partnership, which helps us build world-leading AI fraud tools and handle skyrocketing transaction volumes as we scale. I sit on our global Operational Risk Committee and help ensure our critical services can absorb and recover from disruptions like cyberattacks or system outages. Finally, I do a lot of work to help build the Legal machine at Revolut, we're constantly challenging how we deliver legal services within our business to make sure we keep pace with our rapid global growth.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

My Otago degree taught me how to think critically and cut straight to the core issues of a complex problem. In a fast-paced tech environment, the ability to digest large amounts of information and give clear, commercial advice is a massive advantage. The Otago LLB is rigorous, and that intensity set me up well for a career in a high-pressure environment. Law school essentially trains your brain to stay calm under pressure, think clearly through chaos and ruthlessly prioritise competing demands.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Don't limit yourself based on preconceived ideas of what a legal career 'should' look like. At their core, great lawyers are rational thinkers, problem solvers, and clear communicators. These skills set you up to succeed in almost any environment, so stay curious and open to options even if they aren't clearly labelled 'legal'.



Laura Manson

Venture Capitalist

PARTNER AT ALTERED CAPITAL

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

VENTURE CAPITAL

INVESTMENT

COMMERCE

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I'm a venture capitalist. I invest in some of New Zealand's most promising high-growth companies, backing founders with capital, and actively partnering with them to help scale their ambitions. Think of it as part investor, part trusted advisor, part problem-solver.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

Ending up here was not by design. When I left Otago, I'd barely heard of venture capital, the industry was still in its infancy here in New Zealand. But when I reflect on what energises me, it's clear why I've steered in this direction. I've always had an interest in business, a love of learning about new technologies, and a general curiosity about the world. Most importantly, I thrive working with ambitious people solving interesting problems. Those threads run through everything venture capital is. My path here involved several prior steps, investment banking, corporate strategy, and private equity, each of which gave me relevant exposure to transformational transactions, value creation strategies, and investment frameworks. A strong foundation, even if the destination wasn't always obvious.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

The people, first and foremost. I'm energised by the founders and teams I get to work with as they build something from the ground up, and by the trusted, long-term relationships that form when you go through all the wins (and losses) together. I also love the variety. One day you're getting your head around a novel fintech business; the next, you're helping shape strategy for an aviation software company. Few careers give you the creative licence to dive deep into so many different industries and help solve the problems within them.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

There really isn't one, which is part of the appeal. At its core, my job is to find the best founders to invest in and partner with, so we can generate strong returns for our investors. Everything flows from that: meeting founders and their teams, evaluating investment opportunities, and rolling up my sleeves with existing portfolio companies to help them work through scaling challenges. The one constant is that you're always learning.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

More than I expected. The biggest one is how law teaches you to think: from first principles, critically, and rigorously. So much of legal study is pattern-matching, you take a principle from case law and apply it to a new set of facts. Assessing a company for the first time is similar, drawing on what you know about a given business model or industry. On a practical level, investments require governance and legal documentation, so I feel well-equipped to navigate those, even if I occasionally annoy the lawyers we engage.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Get curious, find ways to get involved, and focus on the quality of the people you work with, there's no linear pathway in, but get those three things right and you'll be setting yourself up for a career you love.



Tom Jemson

Corporate Partner

CHAPMAN TRIPP

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

CORPORATE / M&A

CAPITAL MARKETS

PARTNER

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I'm a corporate Partner at Chapman Tripp, one of New Zealand's largest commercial law firms. My work focuses on helping clients buy and sell businesses, raise capital and execute other significant corporate transactions. In simple terms, I help clients navigate important commercial decisions, identify legal risks and complete deals successfully.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

Yes and no. I wasn't a law student who was passionate about every aspect of the law, nor did I find law school particularly easy, so ending up as a partner at one of NZ's largest firms certainly wasn't a foregone conclusion. However, once I started working at Chapman Tripp and gained exposure to transactional law, I realised there was an area of practice that allowed me to combine legal analysis with commercial strategy and decision-making. After a few years in practice, I had a fairly clear idea that it was a path I wanted to pursue.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

Every transaction is different. I enjoy the combination of legal analysis, commercial strategy and negotiation, and the fact that the work is often fast-paced and dynamic. I also highly value working in a full-service law firm environment. My day-to-day involves collaborating with leading experts across a range of legal specialities to deliver successful outcomes for clients, while also helping coach and develop the next generation of lawyers.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

There is rarely a typical week. Most involve a mix of transaction execution, client meetings, negotiations, people management and business development, with the balance changing depending on what deals are live at the time.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

Otago Law School gave me strong analytical skills and taught me how to identify, assess and solve complex problems. Many of the specific topics I studied are not directly relevant to the area I practise today, but the way law school teaches you to approach a problem certainly is. Equally important were the experiences outside the classroom, my time at Otago was where I made many of my closest friends and developed a confidence in myself that has been invaluable throughout my professional journey.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

If you're interested in combining corporate law with commercial strategy, I'd encourage you to give M&A a go. Some of the core papers, such as Company Law, provide a useful foundation, but most of your learning will happen on the job as you develop an understanding of how transactions work in practice. More broadly, be curious about business as well as law. The best transactional lawyers understand not only the legal issues in a deal, but also what clients are ultimately trying to achieve commercially.



16 COMMERCIAL LAW, FINANCE &
IN-HOUSE

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2013

Emma von Veh

Partner, Employment & Health

BUDDLE FINDLAY

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

EMPLOYMENT LAW

HEALTH LAW

LITIGATION

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I'm a partner in Buddle Findlay's employment and health team. Our practice involves litigation and advisory work across a wide range of issues, including employment, privacy, human rights, health, and public law.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

I started my career working in the in-house legal teams for the Health and Disability Commissioner and the Ministry of Health. This part of my career was unsurprising, as I had focused on and enjoyed the great range of health law papers offered at Otago, while also completing a BSc majoring in Pharmacology. I joined Buddle Findlay about five years into my career, following great reviews from several Otago friends who had started here. I was keen to get exposure to a broader range of work, including litigation, and quickly became drawn into the full range of employment work our team does, and found that I love it! I would have been surprised to be told I'd end up an employment lawyer at university, but in hindsight it has been a relatively natural progression.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

I feel very privileged to do factually and legally interesting work, with clients and colleagues I enjoy working with. Motivation and interest are not hard to come by!

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

My work week varies a lot depending on what I have on. This week, for example, I am representing a client in an employment mediation, working on evidence for a Coroner's inquest, assisting a client with a privacy issue, presenting at a conference, and advising on the establishment of a new government agency. The reliable constant in any week is time spent with my clever, kind and fun colleagues, and with my young family.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

An ability to think critically was one of the most important skills I developed during my law degree, which is more relevant than ever with the increasing use of AI in our work. My work is also deeply relational, and the ability to collaborate effectively, and to understand people's feelings and perspectives, is essential. My experience at Otago, flatting, group assignments, and involvement in law school activities, was formative in developing those skills.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

The practice of employment law is much broader than the labour law course alone, and I'd recommend also taking courses in advocacy, evidence, privacy, contract, mediation and negotiation. I'm always very impressed by students who have sought out practical legal experience during their studies. Employment law offers plenty of opportunity to do that, for example, by volunteering at organisations like Community Law and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

05

SECTION 05

Academia & Litigation

Scholars and advocates who research, teach and litigate.

Oliver Hailes

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Alice Osman

7 KING'S BENCH WALK

James Tocher

RUSSELL MCVEAGH



17 ACADEMIA & LITIGATION

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2015

Oliver Hailes

Assistant Professor

LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

INTERNATIONAL LAW

ARBITRATION

ACADEMIA

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I'm an Assistant Professor at the LSE Law School, where I work mostly on international law and arbitration. For example, I study how disputes between foreign investors and sovereign states are resolved, say, when an investor alleges that its property has been taken without compensation. Many such cases are expected if states phase out fossil fuel infrastructure in view of their environmental obligations.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

I'm surprised by my good luck. Two opportunities were turning points. First, to clerk at the Court of Appeal, where I honed my skills across public and private law under the guidance of Justice Harrison. Second, to study at Cambridge as a Woolf Fisher Scholar, where I focused on international law under the supervision of Professor Waibel for my LLM and Professor Viñuales for my PhD.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

My work is motivated by a conviction that the techniques of international law and arbitration are vital in the peaceful resolution of disputes over energy and natural resources in the light of climate change and other issues of distributive justice. I think this motivation has been sharpened by raising toddlers in a volatile world.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

My week involves a mix of researching and writing my own projects, teaching and supervising my students, and various meetings and admin tasks for the university, journals, and moot teams. Alongside academic conferences, there are occasional opportunities to share my expertise with governments or international organisations, and to contribute to opinions requested by NGOs or submissions before international courts.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

I gained two main skillsets at Otago. The first was instilled by a range of lecturers in the second-year courses: the fundamental skills of issue-spotting, legal reasoning, opinion-writing, and so on. The second was a mindset. Although I was interested in legal and political theory, I'm a pragmatist: the value of knowledge depends on whether it can be put to work by people over time. The most useful course I took was Dr Maria Hook's on the conflict of laws, and I'm grateful to Professor Andrew Geddis for supporting my honours dissertation. That skill is key to my day job.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Any career is a long game, particularly in international law, more so if you desire an academic job. You'll probably need to write a PhD thesis, ideally with a supervisor who can foster your mindset. I've come to realise I'm more of an academic lawyer than a legal academic. My advice is to be driven by problems, not by rudderless ambition to join a top firm or hold a prestigious degree, that will give you a clearer sense of when, where and why to put the law to work. The next step for me is to join Victoria University of Wellington as a Senior Lecturer of Law in late 2026.



18 ACADEMIA & LITIGATION

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2013

Alice Osman

Barrister

7 KING'S BENCH WALK

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM

COMMERCIAL BAR

ARBITRATION

INTERNATIONAL DISPUTES

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I work as a barrister in London at a chambers called 7 King's Bench Walk. I act as an advocate in court and arbitration proceedings and advise clients on legal issues. I practice in commercial law and many of my cases have an international element (e.g. the parties are based outside of the UK, or one of the parties is a foreign country/government).

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

My first roles after graduating were judges' clerking in Auckland (2013–14) and working as a junior barrister in Wellington (2015–16). So, in retrospect, it is perhaps not surprising where I ended up! But initially I was not sure what I wanted to do, and I was keen to explore various potential career routes. I did an LLM in the US focused on international law, then spent a year in New York in roles that allowed me to sample work in foreign affairs, the UN, and NGOs. It was an amazing experience, but it helped me realise that I preferred private practice and disputes work. I moved to London in 2018 and worked in international arbitration at a law firm for several years before transferring to the Bar.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

Commercial disputes arise in a variety of contexts, from energy to technology to sport and entertainment. I love learning about how these different industries operate. I also enjoy grappling with complex facts and law, in an age of constant distractions, it is great having a job that requires you to think deeply and be fully absorbed in a task. Being a barrister involves continuously developing your skills. I find it motivating to observe and learn from senior colleagues who have spent decades mastering the art of advocacy.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

If I am not in a hearing, my typical week is a mix of legal research and drafting; emails, calls and meetings with solicitors and barristers I'm working with; and getting coffees or lunch with workmates. Barristers are self-employed so I can choose where to work, but I usually work from chambers because it's nice seeing colleagues in person and it's a lovely physical environment (in the Temple area, a pocket of historic buildings and gardens in central London). If I am in a trial, then things are more intense; each day is a mix of being in court/arbitration and returning to chambers to strategise with the rest of the counsel team and prepare for the next day.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

My Otago law degree taught me the rigorous analytical skills needed to work as a barrister. Mooting at Otago (and the hours of coaching generously provided by law faculty members!) gave me the confidence to do oral advocacy. Involvement in SOULS and other extracurriculars taught me about working in teams and having an entrepreneurial spirit. I also agree with what many others have said before: living and flatting in the unique environment of Dunedin provides you with invaluable life skills.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

There are many different ways to end up in litigation/arbitration. Mooting is definitely a useful thing to do as a student if you are interested in being an advocate. In England, there is a 'split profession', so you have to qualify as a barrister here to appear in court. There are a few hoops to jump through, but generally a postgraduate law degree and/or some practical experience working in disputes is useful. More broadly, I recommend keeping an open mind about what area of law you might work in, as the most interesting academic subjects are not necessarily the most stimulating areas to practice in, and vice versa.



19 ACADEMIA & LITIGATION

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2017

James Tocher

Senior Associate

RUSSELL MCVEAGH

WELLINGTON

LITIGATION

PUBLIC LAW

COMMERCIAL

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I am a Senior Associate in the litigation team at Russell McVeagh's Wellington office. I would describe our team as offering the perfect combination of public and commercial law, with cases that involve cutting-edge and out-of-the-blue issues. We appear frequently before the Supreme Court on major social issues, such as the employment status of Uber drivers and the delicate interaction between trust law and relationship property. My current focus is on grappling with emerging legal issues posed by artificial intelligence.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

I took a rather indirect path, which was certainly not my plan coming out of law school. I was initially a Judge's Clerk at the High Court in Wellington, then I practiced for three years as a Junior Barrister at Thorndon Chambers. I had never even heard of such a thing at law school, but it was a fantastic experience. It gave me the opportunity to work directly with some of the top barristers in the country, who were very generous in taking me along to court and giving me an opportunity to practice oral argument early in my career.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

My favourite thing about litigation is that you learn so much about the world. To argue well in court, you not only have to become an expert in whatever niche area of law you are dealing with, but also in the business or social circumstances of your client. I have learnt many things I never would have known otherwise about electricity generation, airport operations, and palaeontology to name just a few topics!

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

Although each week looks different, everything a litigator does builds up to the courtroom experience. Whether you are meeting with clients, talking with knowledgeable experts, having strategy discussions with your team, or drafting legal submissions, the goal is always to ensure you have prepared the best version of your client's case. One of the privileges of working at a firm like Russell McVeagh is having the time and resources to consider all the avenues and craft a comprehensive and considered case.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

As a litigator, I still read and keenly analyse case law all the time. I credit that skill to the legendary second-year law experience that sets Otago graduates apart. Nothing else prepared me better to identify the needle in the haystack, especially in urgent situations like filing for an injunction or answering an unexpected question from a judge during oral argument.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

Take every opportunity you can to learn strategy, not just legal principles. Participate in moot competitions, watch hearings in court (from start to finish), and think critically about the parties' submissions when you study case law rather than just the judicial reasoning (there was a litigator behind each case making tactical decisions about which arguments to pursue and how to present them). The secret no one tells you at law school is that most law is never set in stone. Many 'established' principles are only settled by non-binding authority or do not cover modern contexts. The best litigators learn how to transform the law, but also when to try, because it is not the optimal strategy in every case.

06

SECTION 06

Criminal & Family

Lawyers working with clients and in the court in criminal and family law.

Jazmine Cassidy

KAYES FLETCHER WALKER · CROWN SOLICITOR, MANUKAU

Steven Lack

CRIMINAL DEFENCE

Richard Smith

FAMILY & CRIMINAL LAW



20 CRIMINAL & FAMILY

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2020

Jazmine Cassidy

Ngāpuhi

Crown Prosecutor

KAYES FLETCHER WALKER · CROWN SOLICITOR, MANUKAU
MANUKAU, AUCKLAND

CRIMINAL LAW

CROWN PROSECUTION

LITIGATION

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I am a Crown Prosecutor at Kayes Fletcher Walker, the Crown Solicitor's office in Manukau. My role in a nutshell is to prosecute serious crime in South Auckland ranging from assaults to homicide. Most people understand the role of a defence lawyer based on what they see on the news or Netflix, I am the other lawyer in court, whose role is to prove that an individual committed the crime they are charged with by producing evidence to the jury or judge. That is very much a surface-level description of the role of a Crown Prosecutor.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

This was a surprise path for me. The only criminal law paper I completed throughout my degree was the second-year paper, and I always thought I would be a commercial lawyer who would do the usual two years in Aotearoa then move to Australia and/or London to chase the money. I also thought I wasn't strong enough (mentally and emotionally) to work in the criminal justice sector. With that in mind, I secured a graduate role with Simpson Grierson in 2020. Before I started my graduate role (in the summer period between 2019 and 2020), my tuakana Yasmin Olsen spoke to me about the tauira Māori internship at Kayes Fletcher Walker and asked if I would be interested in applying. I got the role and was the inaugural tauira Māori clerk at Kayes Fletcher Walker. During my time over the summer internship I fell in love with the mahi generally, the litigation skills and with the people at Kayes Fletcher Walker. After 14 months at Simpson Grierson, I returned home to Manukau in 2021 and have been here for over five years.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

The majority of my work involves prosecuting sexual violence and physical violence on children and young people. This is a sensitive area that requires the right balance. Doing this mahi, although it pulls at my heartstrings, it motivates me to ensure that the children and young people's voices are heard in the criminal justice system and that there is a safe space for them so that they feel comfortable and confident to tell us about their experiences. Relatedly, ensuring our people are represented in court and assisted in navigating the court system is a big motivator.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

Each week (and day) is different. I would say 80-90% of my week involves going to court and representing the Crown and other government departments, in the District Courts and the Auckland High Court. The hearings vary from jury trials, sentencings, pre-trial hearings, appeal hearings and bail applications. In summary, I'm always on the go and could be running to court at any moment.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

In my fourth year at Otago, I was the Tumuaiki of Te Rōpū Whai Pūtake. Being Tumuaiki enhanced my time management skills and fostered my oral advocacy skills. Including being the māngai for all tauira Māori who were studying law at Otago at all levels.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

If you can, try and shadow a Prosecutor for a day, you'll realise pretty quickly if you can see yourself in the shoes of a Crown Prosecutor, standing in court and giving oral submissions to a judge, or presenting evidence to a jury, or if that is too far out of your comfort zone. Make sure you are ready for the emotional, but equally rewarding, toll this field brings. Karawhiua tauira mā!



21 CRIMINAL & FAMILY

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2013

Steven Lack

Barrister

CRIMINAL DEFENCE

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

CRIMINAL LAW

DEFENCE

ADVOCACY

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

Primarily I act for clients charged with allegations of serious crimes such as transnational drug dealing, organised crime offending, serious fraud and homicide offences. I also act for clients in relation to proceedings brought by the Commissioner of Police under the proceeds of crime legislation and some other work in the civil jurisdiction. I think it is important to accept a range of different types of work and not allow yourself to be pigeonholed into only one type.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

At university I always knew I wanted to work in criminal law. But when I first graduated, jobs as a junior lawyer in criminal law were sadly few and far between. So, I started initially working for a firm in both family and criminal law to get a foot in the door. Eventually I was fortunate to work for a very senior criminal barrister who taught me a lot.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

Every day brings something that keeps me genuinely engaged. Criminal law sits at the intersection of human behaviour, society's values, and the state's power to punish, that tension never gets old. Also, the adversarial nature of the work is something that I really enjoy. It suits people with a competitive streak. There is a real satisfaction in being well-prepared and achieving a positive result for your client. However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that you are dealing with people's lives. Both those of your client and those who are said to have been affected by their alleged offending or conduct.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

One of the best parts about my job is that no two weeks are ever the same. Some weeks I am in the office working on preparing files. For others I could be in a completely different part of the country in trial or in an appeal hearing.

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

I remember my time at Otago well. While criminal law develops over time (and has since I was at university) the fundamentals stay the same. The principles of evidence, advocacy and ethics are all still subjects that are relevant to my everyday practice.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

If criminal law interests you, don't wait for the perfect opportunity, it may not arrive neatly packaged. Start where you can, work hard, and seek out good mentors. The junior lawyers who thrive in this field tend to be those who are curious, resilient, and genuinely care about the people they represent. We need more of them.



22 CRIMINAL & FAMILY

GRADUATED OTAGO · 2004

Richard Smith

Barrister Sole

FAMILY & CRIMINAL LAW

INVERCARGILL

FAMILY LAW

CRIMINAL LAW

YOUTH ADVOCACY

WHAT DO YOU DO NOW?

I am a barrister sole based in Invercargill. Barristers practice on their own account and generally specialise in litigation. I divide my time between family and criminal law work as well as court-appointed work as a lawyer for child (representing their welfare and best interests) and youth advocate (representing young people between the ages of 14-17 facing criminal charges in the Youth Court). I would describe what I do as helping people most often in situations that are some of the most stressful and challenging times of their lives. My goal is to ensure my clients understand my role and the process that they are going through, and to ensure the best outcomes for them whether they are negotiating care arrangements of their children or they are children in the middle of a separation or they are young people who are coming into contact with the justice system for the first time.

HOW DID YOU GET HERE, AND WAS IT A SURPRISE?

I can't remember why I studied law. For my entire time at Otago University I never really considered being a lawyer and definitely never thought I would be a court lawyer. I was going to be an economist. I graduated and got a job in a small town firm. I started out doing a really wide range of law from wills and trusts to commercial and residential property work as well as criminal and Family Court matters. I became a partner at a medium size firm before in 2016 becoming a barrister focussing on family and criminal law matters. I have also been part of the Family Law Section of the New Zealand Law Society since 2017 and am currently its Chair. All of this is a surprise to me. It was never planned and the path I have followed was not one of a deliberate nature. I have always worked hard, wanted to learn, and been curious.

WHAT MOTIVATES AND INTERESTS YOU?

I am motivated by being as good as I can and doing the best for everyone I act for. Being a lawyer, particularly a court lawyer, is a privilege and a responsibility, that is motivation enough. Working alongside other professionals like the police, social workers, court staff, community organisations, other lawyers and communication assistants is fundamental to me and is essential to ensuring the best outcomes for everyone involved in the process. Being part of getting good outcomes, making case law, and persuading the court to do what I want can be a great feeling and continues to drive me in what I do.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WEEK LOOK LIKE?

A typical week for me is a blur. Monday might be a family group conference as lawyer for child in the morning, straight into a meeting with a new family client, drafting an urgent application for a parenting order and protection order, drafting submissions for a case later in the week and then seeing a child client after they finish school. The rest of the week might be two days in court for various matters. I would go to court most days, have client meetings, draft documents and manage my emails and the like. It is all go all the time!

HOW ARE YOUR OTAGO SKILLS STILL RELEVANT?

My Otago degree gave me the ability to think like a lawyer and gave me the skills to know where to look for what I need and then how to interpret it. I am still in contact with some of my old lecturers who are heavyweights in their field and I still learn from them. My degree set me up to be what I am today.

YOUR ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

I think getting a few years of experience of lots of areas of law is the best way to start. Find out what you like or don't like, what you are good at or not so good at. Once you know that you can make an informed decision about what field you want to be in. Lead with humility, pragmatism, and be a good person. Look after yourself as this can be a hard job.

Thank you very much to our
alumni for generously
contributing to this publication.