

Robert—
—Walters

Robert Walters Legal Market Overview 2026



Global Talent Solutions

robertwalters.co.nz

Introduction | Whakatuwheratanga

This comprehensive market overview has been compiled by our National Legal team. It provides insights into key trends during 2025, challenges facing the market, and predictions for 2026 across Aotearoa | New Zealand within Private Practice, In-house and the Public Sector.

Contents | Ngāhua pukapuka

- Private Practice 03
- Foreign qualified and returning lawyers 09
- Public Sector 10
- In-house 12
- Q&A with executive recruiter on transitioning from General Counsel to CEO 16
- Risk, Compliance and Governance 18
- Top motivations for lawyers moving within Aotearoa | New Zealand 20
- Contact us 22



Private Practice update and salary guide

Over the past year, the Private Practice legal market in our main cities has seen a shift in demand. In early 2025, firms focused on litigation and employment roles due to increased disputes and workplace changes. While these areas remain steady, the past 4 months have seen renewed activity in transactional and front-end roles, reflecting growing business confidence. There has also been an increased demand in Wellington for family lawyers, a trend not seen for some time. Given Christchurch's population growth, we will likely also see an increased demand for family lawyers, immigration lawyers, and private client lawyers.

Property teams across Aotearoa | New Zealand's main centres are becoming increasingly busier, with rising demand in residential, commercial, and development work. While government project delays have slowed some development activity, firms are actively hiring at all levels. Seek reports a nationwide increase in advertisements over the past year,

40%

increase in advertised property roles

showing firms are pipelining candidates for the work they are expecting in 2026 as opposed to relying on attracting lateral talent as soon as they need it. Transactional specialists are in demand again, with new roles being created. Some firms are also filling positions previously left vacant during market uncertainty but are now feeling more confident about future growth, especially heading into 2026. While not all firms are actively advertising for talent in the corporate and banking and finance space, lawyers with skillsets in these areas, particularly in mergers and acquisitions, remain in high demand, as they were in 2025. Demand will continue into 2026 due to the evident talent shortage in these spaces in Aotearoa | New Zealand and the competitive packages they are offered overseas.



Job Ad Growth

Property Law	**40.1%**	↑
Law Clerks & Paralegals	**38.4%**	↑
Construction Law	**26.1%**	↑
Criminal & Civil Law	**13.1%**	↑
Litigation & Dispute Resolution	**12.7%**	↑
Corporate & Commercial Law	**7.9%**	↑
Legal Secretaries	**5.0%**	↑
Generalists – In-house	**2.7%**	↑
Other	**0.5%**	↑
Personal Injury Law	**0.0%**	
Family Law	**12.3%**	↓
Industrial Relations & Employment Law	**15.7%**	↓
Generalists – Law Firm	**16.3%**	↓
Environment & Planning Law	**16.4%**	↓
Intellectual Property Law	**16.8%**	↓
Legal Practice Management	**26.0%**	↓
Tax Law	**36.7%**	↓
Banking & Finance Law	**37.5%**	↓
Insurance & Superannuation Law	**37.6%**	↓
Total	**3.7%**	↑

Construction and projects work has also gained momentum, driven more by roading and civil works than large-scale infrastructure. The government has allocated significant funding in this space and firms in Auckland and Christchurch report stronger pipelines in transport related projects. This has led to an increased demand for lawyers with both technical legal skills and practical project management capabilities - Wellington is yet to see the same level of demand, but it is expected in 2026.

According to Seek, there has been a 26% increase in construction adverts in the last 12 months across Aotearoa | New Zealand, but we expect that this has predominantly occurred in the last 4 months of increased economic activity. In turn there has been an uptick in demand for the necessary services of resource management lawyers as well.

The most competitive pressure for talent remains at the senior solicitor, associate and senior associate level (4-8 PQE). Firms are widening the scope of their hiring to Commonwealth qualified lawyers looking to relocate to Aotearoa | New Zealand. There has also been reasonable mobility of lawyers to Christchurch, viewed as being a new vibrant city that offers great work life balance. Firms, especially in Auckland and Wellington, are not only competing with each other but also with In-house roles, making salary and career development key factors in attracting and retaining talent.

The regions have certainly felt the impact of the tough economic climate, with the Bay of Plenty contracting by 11.4% and Waikato growing only slightly at 1.5%. In contrast, South Island regions like Otago have seen stronger demand, with job vacancies rising 16% year-on-year. Infrastructure expansion and a strong agricultural sector are driving steady workflows, but attracting senior talent remains a challenge.

Smaller local talent pools and longer vacancy periods persist, although there is an appetite for external candidates with an average of 30% moving regionally for legal roles.

"Apryl was fantastic to work with during my recruitment process. She demonstrated in depth and up to date knowledge of the market and always went the extra mile to ensure the process went smoothly. I'd highly recommend her to other UK based lawyers considering a move back to New Zealand"

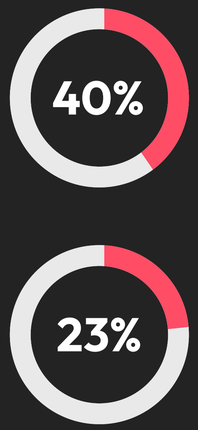
Top-tier candidate

It is clear from conversations with several regional firms, their property teams experienced a quiet start to the year as uncertainty loomed around government policies, international tariffs and unpredictable interest rates. However, demand for litigation lawyers has remained constant, and transactional roles have surged in Q3 as market confidence improves, mirroring trends in major centres.

In the lower North and South Island, sustainability pressures and environmental regulations are increasing demand for compliance and resource management lawyers. Private client work also remains strong across all regions, driven by an ageing population retiring to regional towns.

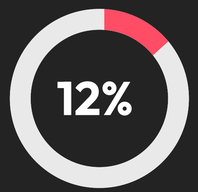
Lifestyle appeal continues to attract city-based lawyers to regional areas, and firms are increasingly matching pay and flexibility offered in larger centres. However, concerns around workflow volume and matter complexity persist, especially for intermediate lawyers. Looking ahead to 2026, firms that embrace innovation, diversity, flexible working, and specialisation will be best positioned to thrive in a changing market.

Law firms looking to hire in the next year

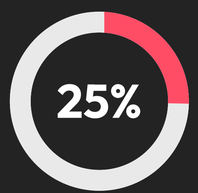


Actively hiring now

Planning to hire next 3-6 months



Planning to hire in the next 6-12 months



Not hiring for the foreseeable future

Source: Robert Walters 2025/2026 Salary Survey



“Apryl and her team took the time to understand what we were looking for – not just technical requirements, but the kind of people who would thrive in our firm. Their deep knowledge and thoughtful approach meant we received candidates who were highly qualified and aligned with our values. The process was seamless, collaborative, and surprisingly fast. We felt supported every step of the way.”

Lucy Su’a
HR Advisor - MinterEllisonRuddWatts

Private Practice salary guide

Auckland top tier / boutique specialists

PQE	Salary
Graduate 0-1 years	$70,000 - $75,000
Solicitor 1-2 years	$85,000 - $95,000
Solicitor 2-4 years	$100,000 - $130,000
Senior Solicitor / Associate 4-8 years	$130,000 - $190,000
Senior Associate - 7-10	$180,000 - $220,000
Senior Associate 10+	$210,000 - $250,000
Special Counsel	$250,000 - $300,000
Salaried Partner	Salaries/earnings are varied across firm type, firm structure, an individual. Call one of our consultants for a confidential discussion on specific information relevant to you.
Equity Partner	

Other Auckland firms including medium and full-service firms

PQE	Salary
Graduate 0-1 years	$60,000 - $70,000
Solicitor 1-2 years	$70,000 - $90,000
Solicitor 2-4 years	$90,000 - $120,000
Senior Solicitor / Associate 4-8 years	$120,000-$190,000
Senior Associate - 7-10 years	$160,000-$200,000
Senior Associate 10+ years	$180,000-$220,000
Special Counsel	$180,000-$250,000
Salaried Partner	Salaries/earnings are varied across firm type, firm structure, an individual. Call one of our consultants for a confidential discussion on specific information relevant to you.
Equity Partner	



Types of benefits offered across Private Practice:

- 26 weeks top up parental leave or other enhanced or bespoke packages
- Some top-tier and boutique firms offer up to 20-40% bonus once a lawyer reaches Senior Associate level, however it is variable based on firm
- Some firms offer pre-agreed guaranteed bonuses if budget is met, and/or discretionary bonuses
- $2,000 - $20,000 sign-on bonuses
- $2000-$10,000 relocation packages
- Senior Associates + additional 1 week annual leave
- $500 - $1000 wellness allowance
- Discounted medical insurance
- Flexible working arrangements

Private Practice salary guide

Wellington top tier / boutique specialists

PQE	Salary
Graduate 0-1 years	$70,000 - $75,000
Solicitor 1-2 years	$80,000-$100,000
Solicitor 2-4 years	$100,000 - $125,000
Senior Solicitor / Associate 4-8 years	$125,000-$170,000
Senior Associate - 7-10 years	$170,000-$210,000
Senior Associate 10+ years	$190,000-$235,000
Special Counsel	$210,000-$300,000
Salaried Partner	Salaries/earnings are varied across firm type, firm structure, an individual. Call one of our consultants for a confidential discussion on specific information relevant to you.
Equity Partner	

Other Wellington Firms including medium and full-service firms

PQE	Salary
Graduate 0-1 years	$60,000-$70,000
Solicitor 1-2 years	$70,000-$90,000
Solicitor 2-4 years	$80,000-$110,000
Senior Solicitor / Associate 4-8 years	$110,000-$160,000
Senior Associate - 7-10 years	$160,000-$180,000
Senior Associate 10+ years	$170,000-$200,000
Special Counsel	$180,000-$250,000
Salaried Partner	Salaries/earnings are varied across firm type, firm structure, an individual. Call one of our consultants for a confidential discussion on specific information relevant to you.
Equity Partner	



Private Practice salary guide

Christchurch top-tier / boutique specialists

PQE	Salary
Graduate 0-1 years	$60,000-$70,000
Solicitor 1-2 years	$75,000-$95,000
Solicitor 2-4 years	$90,000-$110,000
Senior Solicitor / Associate 4-8 years	$110,000-$150,000
Senior Associate - 7-10 years	$160,000-$190,000
Senior Associate 10+ years	$180,000-$200,000
Special Counsel	$190,000+
Salaried Partner	Salaries/earnings are varied across firm type, firm structure, an individual. Call one of our consultants for a confidential discussion on specific information relevant to you.
Equity Partner	

Other Christchurch firms including medium size and full-service firms

PQE	Salary
Graduate 0-1 years	$55,000-$65,000
Solicitor 1-2 years	$70,000-$85,000
Solicitor 2-4 years	$85,000-$100,000
Senior Solicitor / Associate	$95,000 - $140,000
Senior Associate - 7-10 years	$145,000-$170,000
Senior Associate 10+ years	$165,000-$190,000
Special Counsel	170,000+
Salaried Partner	Salaries/earnings are varied across firm type, firm structure, an individual. Call one of our consultants for a confidential discussion on specific information relevant to you.
Equity Partner	



"From the outset, my experience with Robert Walters was professional and stress-free. Kate Williams and Sarah Kim delivered a high-calibre recruitment experience. I was impressed by their level of responsiveness and their natural ability to match capability with opportunity, thus reinforcing my confidence throughout the whole process. I would unreservedly recommend them to any legal professional aspiring to a role at the highest level."

Usha
Candidate

Foreign qualified and returning Kiwi lawyers

For a deeper look at the requalification process and pathways available to foreign-qualified lawyers, read our blog 'Requalifying as a Lawyer in New Zealand'

The economic slowdown has prompted more Kiwis to explore career opportunities overseas in 2025 compared to last year, and New Zealand Qualified lawyers remain a significant part of that migration. Several top-tier firms we work with estimate that around 70% of the lawyers that leave each year are going overseas.

To bridge this talent gap, firms are increasingly turning to international candidates. In recent months we have successfully placed lawyers qualified in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Scotland and France, attracted by the lifestyle here and the broader, more varied work on offer compared to the narrower specialisations abroad. Many are also attracted to the safe haven of New Zealand in the current global climate. Lawyers from common-law jurisdictions remain the most sought-after to fill the talent gap, however, some top-tier firms have indicated an openness to American qualified lawyers, provided they are trained by a Legal 500 ranked firm.

However, foreign-qualified lawyers face significant hurdles when requalifying in Aotearoa | New Zealand. The New Zealand Council for Legal Education has set a process that is both lengthy and costly, and markedly less straightforward than in many comparable jurisdictions.

For example, in Australia and the United Kingdom, transferring legal qualifications typically takes about a year and follows a consistent pathway regardless of the applicant's country of origin. By contrast, New Zealand requires candidates to first pay a substantial assessment fee, after which they are advised which university law papers must be completed. These papers generally take at least 2 years to finish and come with considerable expense.

Many law firms agree the requalification framework needs a complete overhaul to bring it in line with Australia and the United Kingdom, as the current system is no longer fit for purpose. Without reform, more lawyers will opt to transfer their qualifications through Australia, where the process is roughly a quarter of the cost and takes half the time, or, worse, decide against moving to Aotearoa | New Zealand altogether because of the prohibitive expense and delays.

However, this should not discourage foreign-qualified lawyers from entering the Aotearoa | New Zealand market. A New Zealand qualification is not required to practise in a law firm here, and many overseas-qualified lawyers build long and successful careers without one. It only becomes essential if you aim for partnership or a senior role such as a general counsel, and generally the firms will support foreign-qualified lawyers while they go through the re-qualification process.

With top-tier legal talent continuing to head offshore, maintaining a strong pipeline of international lawyers is critical to sustaining Aotearoa | New Zealand's legal market and closing the widening talent gap.

Public Sector update and salary guide

The Public Sector has undergone significant changes marked by widespread job cuts. Although the number of lawyers made redundant was not as pronounced compared to other industries, the ripple effects are evident.

In 2024 and throughout 2025, we observed a notable trend of lawyers, ranging from graduates to chief legal advisors, leaving Wellington's Public Sector hub and, in many cases, Aotearoa | New Zealand altogether, often relocating to Australia. While Kiwis have traditionally sought overseas opportunities at the intermediate level, this shift now includes senior-level lawyers departing with their institutional knowledge.

Compounding this issue, graduate and intern positions were significantly reduced, prompting many new graduates to leave earlier than anticipated or pursue non-legal positions. This raises concerns about whether these people will return to the legal profession or to Aotearoa | New Zealand in the future.

The legal industry is grappling with talent shortages across the board, but in the Public Sector this is particularly noticeable at the senior solicitor level. Election years typically bring heightened workloads for Public Sector employees as governments prioritise advancing key initiatives. Consequently, some lawyers hesitate to change roles during this period due to perceived risks or concerns about the pressure their current teams will be under.

However, this reluctance can lead to burnout, a challenge already evident in many legal teams due to insufficient resources. The resulting strain makes it difficult for organisations to retain staff and attract new talent when hiring becomes necessary.

Top reasons for relocation

1. Higher salary or better benefits
2. Better career or job opportunities
3. Desire for lifestyle or environment change
4. Improved work-life balance

Source: Robert Walters 2025/2026 Salary Survey

Election years also introduce uncertainty regarding government priorities, policies, and leadership changes, leaving some lawyers apprehensive about whether their work will remain relevant or adequately supported under a new government. On a more positive note, the demand for legal expertise remains strong as lawyers play a critical role in risk mitigation, a priority during times of fiscal restraint. Over 2025, there has been an increase in fixed-term contracts and a preference for hiring at the intermediate level. While fewer candidates are actively applying for advertised roles at the senior solicitor level, they are often closely monitoring the market. While we have seen an increase in senior positions too, there are limited roles at the principal level. Skillsets in highest demand include experience with primary and secondary legislation, litigation expertise, and broad public law knowledge. This trend is expected to continue into 2026 alongside sustained demand for employment lawyers and those with Te Tiriti o Waitangi expertise as various groups challenge government decisions on key issues.

There has been a noticeable increase in Public Sector legal job vacancies. In our previous overview, we predicted that ministers would question departmental chief executives about delays in delivering funded programs and initiatives which is now materialising. Departments with funding are actively hiring, while those without sufficient resources are operating at a pace where risk mitigation is compromised, or they are not able to attract the talent they require.

The government's focus remains on achieving improved outcomes across health, education, law and order, housing, work, and environmental sectors. The 2025 Budget allocated substantial investments to health, education, and defence, the most heavily funded areas with significant spending directed toward infrastructure development and operational enhancements. Health and education each received over a billion dollars for new hospitals and school facilities, while defence saw increased funding aimed at boosting capability. These investments are likely to drive growth in legal opportunities within these sectors.

The broader economic landscape continues to impact the legal market through job losses, lingering effects of COVID-19 disruptions, and ongoing organisational restructures. These challenges have reshaped priorities within the profession, fuelled demand for innovative legal solutions, and underscored the importance of adaptability among lawyers.

Budget 2025 package	Average annual operating $ million (net of reprioritisation)
Health	1,752
Investment boost	1,660
Defence and foreign affairs	477
Education	381
Law and order	263
Disability support services	255
Business, science and innovation	130
Social investment	69
Transport	64
Other new spending	1,199
Additional revenue and savings	(4,911)
Total Budget 2025	**1,338**

Source: treasury.govt.nz



In-house update and salary guide

Despite an annual growth trend of around 10% (according to the New Zealand Law Society) in the number of in-house counsel roles in Aotearoa | New Zealand, this year has seen a marked slowdown in new opportunities, reflecting the lingering effects of the recession.

Although in-house legal teams remain busy, hiring managers are finding it challenging to secure budget approval to expand, or in some cases even maintain, their legal headcount.

The banking and finance sector has been particularly affected, with many institutions implementing hiring freezes. As a result, there is currently a strong pool of experienced banking and finance lawyers in the market, only seeking in-house positions, ready to move when these freezes are lifted.

There has also been a noticeable decrease in specific construction and property in-house roles, likely due to the slowdown in large infrastructure and construction projects across Aotearoa | New Zealand. However, we expect this to change given there has been an increased demand already in Private Practice; teams may start to internalise some of their resources. Instead of hiring lawyers dedicated to this space, some in-house teams are hiring more generalist lawyers to do that work as well, trying to manage costs in outsourcing. However, there remains a need to brief some of the work out as many don't have the specialist expertise required.

According to Seek data there were:

270	legal counsel adverts posted over the past 12 month down from the year previous.
150+	of these were Auckland based
65	were Wellington based
30	were in the Canterbury region





Employer hiring experiences in the past year



Source: Robert Walters 2025/2026 Salary Survey

There has been a strong upswing in lawyers exploring a move in-house across all levels and practice areas. Over the past 12 months, “legal counsel” and “counsel” have ranked among the most-searched legal terms on Seek. As recruitment consultants, we are speaking daily with experienced lawyers eager to transition in-house, particularly at the senior level. For some, it is driven by their desire to be more integrated within the business, and for others, they feel that is how they will get better work life balance.

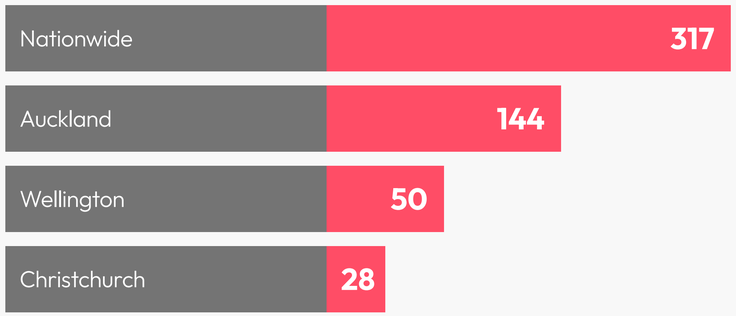
The challenge? Many are seeking highly specific positions that rarely surface in the Aotearoa | New Zealand market. We are also hearing from senior Kiwi in-house lawyers based in London who are keen to return home, only to find that the roles they are after simply do not yet exist here.

“Friendly, positive staff who showed understanding with my current circumstances. The conversation was transparent from both sides, which built a genuine trust.”

Briar
Candidate

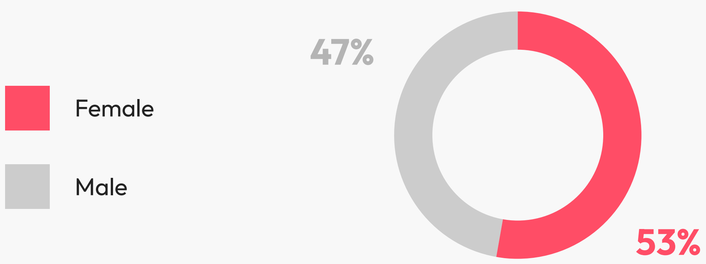
In addition, we are observing a shift toward hiring for more junior in-house roles, a change from the Aotearoa | New Zealand market's previous preference for senior lawyers. This appears driven by budget pressures and a desire to maintain balanced team structures rather than becoming overly top-heavy.

General Counsels and Chief Legal Advisors represent only a small slice of Aotearoa | New Zealand's legal market



Data from LinkedIn Talent Insights

Gender diversity



Competition for these positions is fierce. Many highly skilled senior lawyers aspire to them, yet the roles rarely become available. In the past year, Seek listed only 37 General Counsel vacancies in Auckland and 9 in Wellington. As a result, we're seeing more senior in-house lawyers pivot into senior commercial or executive positions outside pure legal work to leverage their expertise and achieve the career progression they crave.

Although the past 12 months have felt slower for in-house hiring, indicators point to renewed growth ahead. Seek reports that in-house legal roles still show the strongest advertisement growth, up 67% year-on-year, and rising business confidence suggests hiring freezes will ease by year-end.

We expect the primary sector, technology and digital/AI ventures, healthcare, and renewable energy to drive much of this demand. Companies continue to recognise the significant cost savings and strategic value of strong internal legal teams, with the versatile "in-house generalist" remaining the most sought-after profile. Lawyers with broad, adaptable experience will be especially well positioned to capture these opportunities.



"Excellent communication and timeliness with this recruitment. Robert Walters understood the brief and were able to present a range of candidates for us to interview to see who demonstrated skill and team fit."

Farah
Head of Legal - Oceania
Football Confederation

In-house salary guide

Industry	PQE	Salary	Benefits
Financial Services, Funds and Insurance	Legal Counsel	$80,000 - $150,000	• 20-30% bonus • 6 weeks annual leave • Health Insurance • LTIPS, • Flexible working • 6 month paid maternity policies
	Senior Legal Counsel	$150,000 - $240,000	
	Principal	$200,000 - $280,000	
	General Counsel	$500,000+	
Telecommunications, AI/Cloud and Technology	Legal Counsel	$80,000 - $150,000	• Flexible Working, • LTIPS & Share Schemes
	Senior Legal Counsel	$150,000 - $200,000	
	Principal /Sole Counsel	$200,000 - $250,000	
	General Counsel	$350,000+	
Construction, Energy, Renewables Infrastructure and Real Estate	Legal Counsel	$80,000 - $160,000	• 20-50% bonuses • Insurances
	Senior Legal Counsel	$160,000 - $210,000	
	Principal	$210,000 - $250,000	
	General Counsel	$380.000 +	
FMCG, Media, Retail, Sports and Entertainment	Legal Counsel	$70,000 - $100,000	• Industry related benefits • 10-20% bonuses
	Senior Legal Counsel	$100,000 - $160,000	
	Principal	$160,000 - $200,000	
	General Counsel	$250,000 +	



In-house salary guide

Industry	PQE	Salary	Benefits
Start-ups and SME's	Legal Counsel	$90,000 - $130,000	• LTIP's & Share incentives • Wellness benefits • Flexible working
	Senior Legal Counsel	$130,000 - $190,000	
	Principal / Sole Counsel	$190,000 +	
	General Counsel	$250,000 +	
Public Sector *These are broad accounting for the variable salary bands within public sector agencies. Crown entities typically pay at the higher end of the noted bandings but there are still exceptions to this in some organisations. Our consultants are happy to discuss this with you further.	Legal Counsel / Solicitor	$80,000-$130,000	• Relocation up to $6,000 • Flexible Working
	Senior Solicitor	$120,000-$165,000	
	Principal	$150,000-$190,000	
	Legal Manager	$160,000-$210,000	
	Senior Legal Counsel (Crown Entity)	$145,000-$200,000	
	Associate General Counsel / Legal Manager (Crown Entity)	$170,000-$220,000	
	General Counsel / Chief Legal Advisor	190,000+	
Risk & Compliance	Assistant Company Secretary	$140,000 - $180,000	
	Company Secretary	$200,000 +	



Q&A with Executive Recruitment Consultant discussing transitioning from General Counsel to CEO

Question 1

Which non-legal skills or credentials most help a General Counsel demonstrate readiness for a CEO, COO, or Corporate Affairs role?

- **Financial acumen:** P&L responsibility, budgeting, commercial decision-making
- **Operational management:** leading cross-functional projects, overseeing non-legal teams
- **Strategic involvement:** leading cross-functional projects, overseeing non-legal teams
- **Leadership:** proven ability to inspire and guide diverse teams
- **Tech-savviness:** experience driving digital transformation or major technology initiatives

Question 2

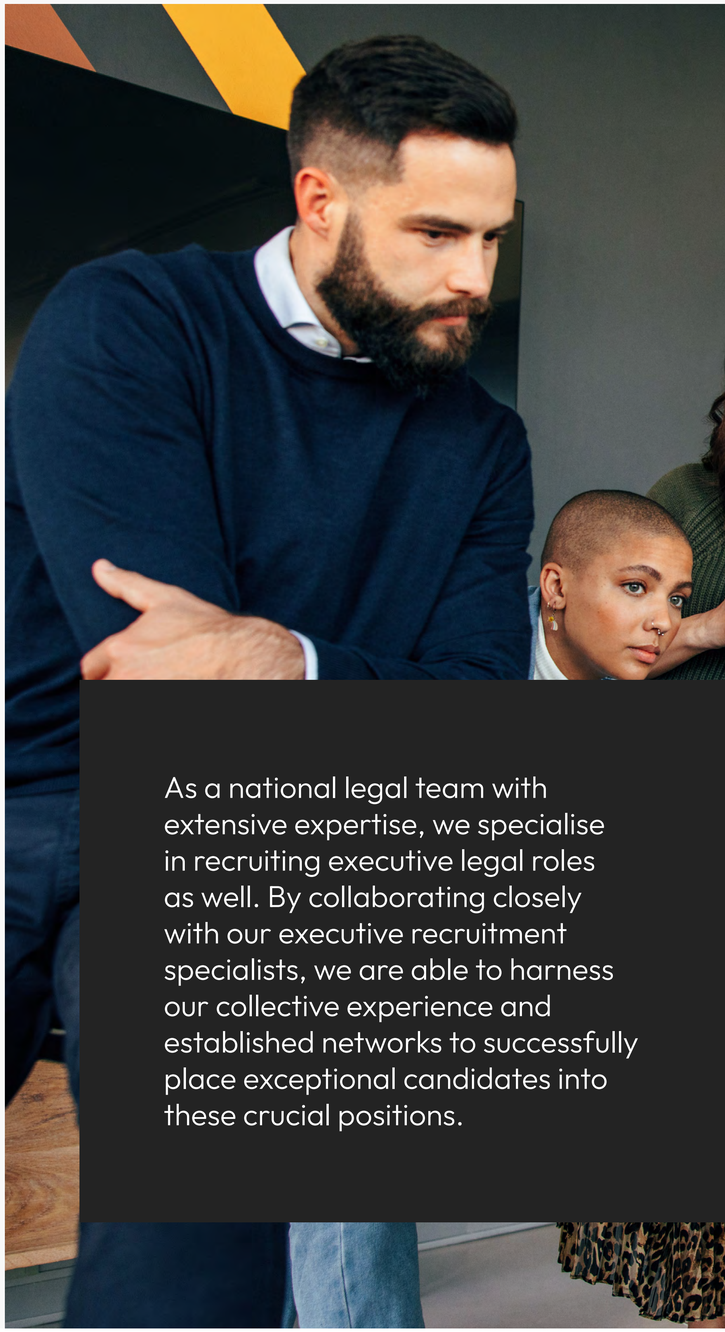
What strategies can General Counsel's use to raise their profile with boards, executive search firms, and key decision-makers so they're considered for executive roles and not just legal ones?

- Take on projects central to commercial strategy (e.g., M&A, ESG, enterprise risk)
- Network through the Institute of Directors and other board-facing forums
- Stay visible to executive search firms such as Robert Walters
- Cultivate senior mentors who can advocate for your leadership potential

Question 3

Are there particular interim positions that you see as effective stepping stones from General Counsel to CEO or COO?

- **Chief of Staff**: direct exposure to strategy and operations, close collaboration with the CEO
- **Corporate Affairs**: combines legal, communications, and stakeholder engagement
- **Hybrid legal/risk/compliance roles**: broaden operational footprint ahead of a C-suite moves



As a national legal team with extensive expertise, we specialise in recruiting executive legal roles as well. By collaborating closely with our executive recruitment specialists, we are able to harness our collective experience and established networks to successfully place exceptional candidates into these crucial positions.



Neil Munro
Business Director | Executive Search
Robert Walters

To read the full Q&A with Neil Munro click here.

Question 4

How important is board experience, whether as a company secretary or independent director, and what's the best way for a General Counsel to build those credentials?

- Not essential but provides a strong competitive edge for C-suite appointments
- Demonstrates governance expertise and understanding of CEO–board dynamics
- Pathway: start with pro bono or not-for-profit directorships › progress to paid governance roles
- Serving as company secretary deepens familiarity with board processes

Question 5

From a recruitment perspective, which industries are most receptive to appointing former General Counsels into top executive or corporate affairs positions, and why?

- **Financial services**: banks, insurers, fintechs value risk-management expertise
- **Healthcare and life sciences**: highly regulated, stakeholder-intensive
- **Energy and infrastructure**: complex compliance and strategic demands
- **Listed multinationals**: appreciate leaders combining legal and commercial strategy skills

Alternative career paths for lawyers in risk, compliance and governance

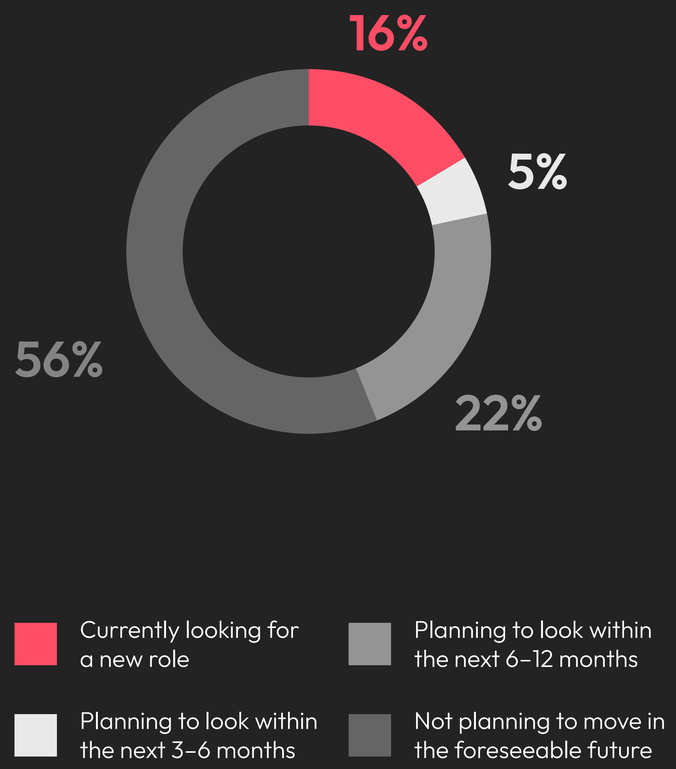
Investigations

Organisations are applying a much stronger lens to the robustness of their investigation processes. Over the past 12 months, there has been a noticeable focus on closing gaps that could undermine the credibility of an investigation or expose entities to regulatory challenge. Many regulators are reassessing how they are perceived externally and are seeking to ensure that investigation outcomes stand up to scrutiny. This has created higher demand for lawyers with litigation or prosecution experience, who can uplift processes and ensure evidentiary standards are maintained.

Privacy

Privacy remains a key growth area as organisations grapple with the dual challenges of reputational risk and regulatory enforcement under the Privacy Act 2020. The role of privacy functions will only expand as technology, AI, and data-driven business models continue to evolve. Across Aotearoa | New Zealand there is a well-documented skills shortage in this space, making it an attractive transition pathway for lawyers. Legal training equips professionals to interpret and apply legislation, draft policies and frameworks, conduct privacy impact assessments, advise on data-sharing arrangements, and manage investigations and breach responses, — all of which are critical in modern privacy practice.

Job change intentions among legal professionals



Source: Robert Walters 2025/2026 Salary Survey

Risk

Risk functions in Aotearoa | New Zealand are continuing to mature, with boards and executives placing greater emphasis on risk's role in creating value rather than simply identifying threats. Lawyers bring valuable skills here: the ability to interpret complex regulatory environments, provide clear advice to senior stakeholders, and exercise judgment in balancing risks with business objectives. Effective risk leaders are trusted advisers to the chief executive and the board, able to convey difficult messages without eroding confidence. The ability to educate, influence, and embed risk thinking across an organisation makes legal professionals particularly well-suited to leadership roles within this space.

Governance

Strong governance is a priority for regulators, investors, and boards, particularly in listed and highly regulated sectors. The NZX Corporate Governance Code and evolving disclosure requirements demand robust board practices, committee structures, and reporting frameworks. Lawyers are well-placed to contribute to governance functions through their understanding of statutory obligations, fiduciary duties, contract frameworks, and compliance with disclosure regimes. They can also add value in shaping board charters, delegation frameworks, and assurance maps, ensuring governance structures are legally sound and strategically aligned.



Top six motivations for lawyers moving within Aotearoa | New Zealand

Lawyers tend to move roles for a fairly consistent set of motivations. It's important for clients to consider these, and what they may be able to offer future candidates. Based on recent trends and conversations in the profession, the top motivations for lawyers moving within Aotearoa | New Zealand include:

1. Career progression and development

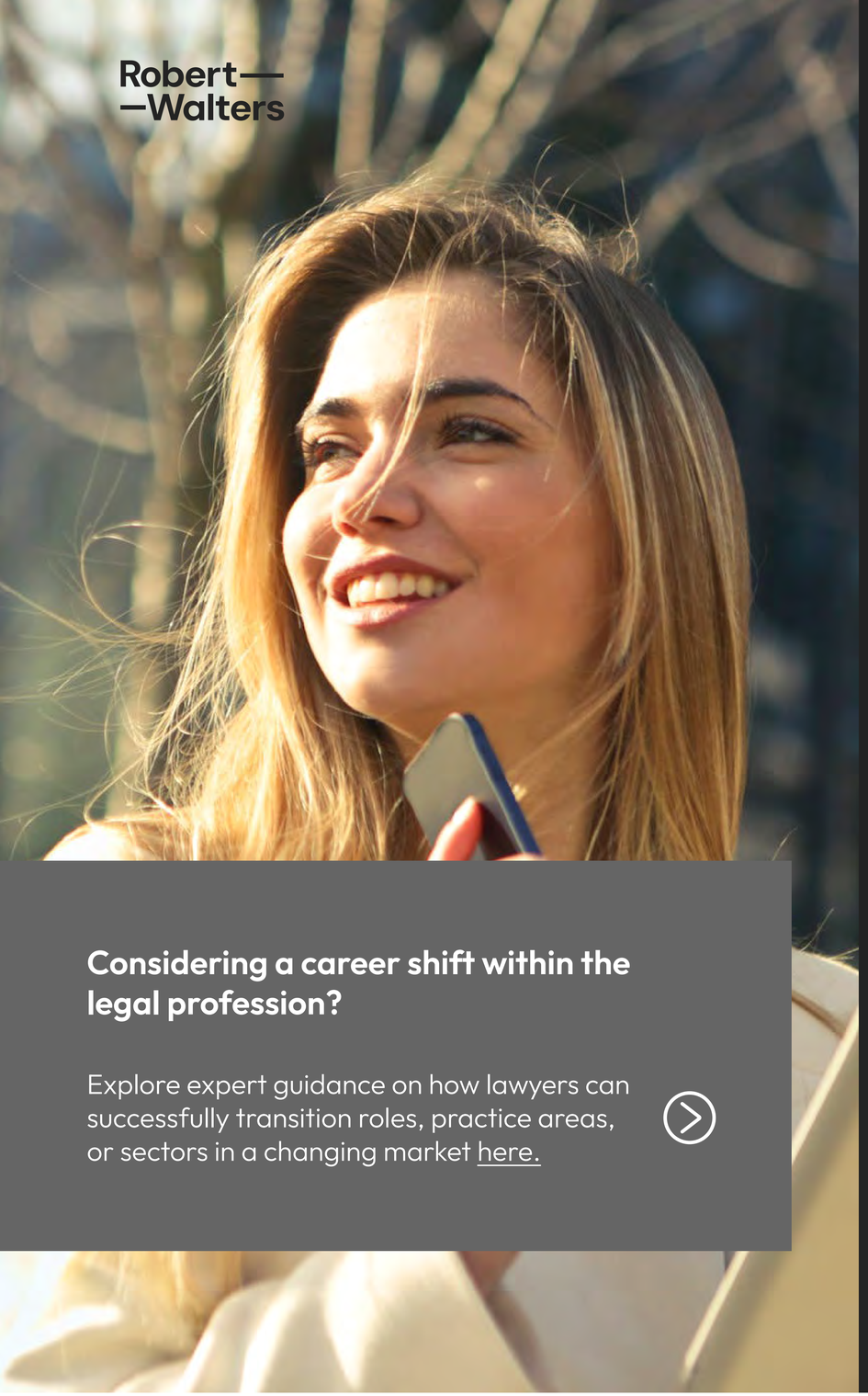
- Clearer partnership pathways in Private Practice
- Opportunities to step up into senior or leadership positions
- Broader or more specialised work (e.g., moving from general commercial into corporate/M&A, or from litigation into niche areas)

2. Work-life balance and flexibility

- Hybrid or remote work options are a key driver
- More sustainable workloads, especially for junior and mid-level lawyers experiencing burnout in large firms
- Desire to move out of high-pressure environments into roles with less of a focus on the traditional billable hours focus

3. Remuneration and benefits

- Salary increases remain a strong motivator, particularly in a competitive market where firms and in-house teams are paying to secure talent
- Benefits like additional annual leave, wellness initiatives, or bonuses also play a part



Considering a career shift within the legal profession?

Explore expert guidance on how lawyers can successfully transition roles, practice areas, or sectors in a changing market here.

4. Culture and team environment

- A supportive, collaborative workplace culture is often valued above pure pay
- Moves are common when lawyers feel underappreciated or unsupported by partners/management

5. Nature of work and client exposure

- Access to higher-profile, complex, or more intellectually stimulating matters
- Direct client contact and business development opportunities, especially for those eyeing future leadership roles
- In-house lawyers often cite wanting to be closer to the commercial decision-making process

6. Location and lifestyle factors

- Relocation between large cities and regional centres for lifestyle, housing affordability, or family reasons
- Returning Kiwis from overseas (and foreign qualified lawyers) also seek roles that balance stimulating work with Aotearoa | New Zealand's lifestyle advantages

Contact us

We have offices in Auckland and Wellington and recruit across the North and South Island with specialised consultants dedicated to each relevant area. Our non-commission model encourages our National Legal Team to work collaboratively across Aotearoa | New Zealand. We also have a strong legal presence in Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, Canada, Switzerland, South Africa, Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, United Arab Emirates and the USA, who refer returning Aotearoa | New Zealand qualified lawyers to our team. If you would like to discuss any of the above in more detail, please don't hesitate to reach out to our team.

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Auckland



Rosamund More
Senior Manager, Legal and Commercial



Kate Williams
Senior Manager, Legal



Kristen Dewar
Senior Consultant, Legal



Suanne Briggs
Senior Consultant, Legal



Sarah Kim
Researcher, Legal

Wellington & Christchurch



Apryl Burgess
Business Director, Legal



Johnny Gowland
Principal Consultant, Legal



Gabriella Vettoretti
Manager, Legal, Risk and Compliance

Notable changes in the Aotearoa | New Zealand Legal Market

To keep up to date with the latest changes in the legal world click here.

Robert—
—Walters

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