

	Last Updated: 17/09/2026		
Job Title	Senior Lawyer – Commercial		
Faculty/ Department	Governance & Risk Assurance	Legal Entity	Operate Surrey Limited
Job Family	Professional Services	Job Level	6
Reports To	Director of Legal Services	Line Manages (role title(s))	N/A

Job Statement

This role provides expert legal advice and support to clients of Operate Surrey Limited (in particular its parent company, the University of Surrey and its other group companies). The role will focus on delivering legal advice across a broad range of complex and high-risk legal matters including commercial contracts, consumer protection law, collaborative provision arrangements, exchange and study abroad agreements, placement agreements, international student recruitment, transnational education (TNE) and regulatory compliance. The role will also entail advice on one or more of the following areas, often in the context of the contracts referred to above: intellectual property, corporate law, data protection, property, construction, employment law, student matters, investigations and dispute resolution. The role is responsible for protecting the University's legal position, reputation and financial interests through the management of significant legal risk and the provision of strategic legal advice to senior leaders. The postholder will support the business to enable the delivery of the university's strategic objectives, ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements including those of the Office for Students, charity law obligations and relevant legislation such as the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation.

Key Responsibilities This is not designed to be a list of all tasks undertaken but the main responsibilities

1. Drafting, reviewing, amending and negotiating often complex legal agreements, without the need for supervision, for a broad range of contractual arrangements including: purchasing and supply of goods and services, IT contracts (including SaaS and licence agreements), student contracts, placement agreements (including clinical placements), exchange and study abroad agreements, collaborative provision (e.g. dual degree agreements, articulation agreements and progression agreements), international student recruitment representative agreements and transnational education agreements (TNE).
2. Acting as primary contact and thought leader within the Legal team in post holder's area of specialism and in relation to specific major projects and working groups.
3. Providing authoritative legal advice on novel, complex and high-risk matters where there may be no established precedent, exercising significant independent professional judgement to determine legal strategy, manage institutional risk and support executive decision making
4. Ensuring compliance with higher education regulatory frameworks, including (but not limited to) conditions of registration set by the Office for Students, charity law obligations, Consumer Rights Act 2015, UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018 and institutional governance requirements.
5. Advising senior leaders on regulatory compliance matters and representing the University in interactions with key regulatory bodies, including the Office for Students.
6. Lead the management of contentious legal matters. Act as the University's legal representative, developing litigation strategy, preparing legal submissions, managing witness evidence and liaising directly with courts, tribunals, regulators and external counsel.
7. Leading development / improvement projects, including in relation to the development of new policies and processes.
8. Creating, maintaining or improving templates and guidance documents to improve efficiency and to support the wider organisation.
9. Collaborating with senior leadership team, academics and professional services to achieve required outcomes and enable teams to deliver university strategic objectives.

10. Managing relationships with external legal counsel, ensuring cost effective and high-quality support when specialist advice is required.
11. Supervising and mentoring junior Legal team members, supporting their development and ensuring high standards of achievement.

N.B. The above list is not exhaustive.

Role Scope and Impact This is a summary of the post holder's role in delivering outcomes, making decisions, and the complexity of problem-solving involved in the role.

1. Accountability

The postholder exercises substantial independent professional responsibility and discretion across a wide range of legal matters. Decisions may have significant financial, reputational, regulatory and operational consequences for the University. The role is required to assess and manage novel and complex legal risks, determine appropriate legal strategies and provide advice to senior stakeholders in circumstances where there may be no clear precedent or established course of action. Where appropriate this will be in consultation with the Director of Legal Services, University Secretary and/or Executive Board members.

2. Problem Solving

The post holder will manage complex legal issues, ensuring practical solutions are provided. Tasks will require both independent judgment and collaboration with senior leadership when necessary.

Supplementary Information

The role impacts the legal operations of Operate Surrey Limited and the University of Surrey and its other group companies, influencing policy, contracts and compliance. The post holder will interact with a wide range of stakeholders, including academics, professional services and external clients.

Person Specification This section describes the knowledge, experience & competence required by the post holder that is necessary for standard acceptable performance in carrying out this role.

Qualifications and Professional Memberships		
Professionally qualified with a relevant degree/postgraduate qualification, plus broad demonstrable management experience in similar or related roles		E
Relevant post qualification experience		E
Qualified (in England and Wales) solicitor or barrister with current practicing certificate		E
Membership of relevant professional legal body (e.g. Law Society or General Council of the Bar)		E
Technical Competencies (Experience and Knowledge) This section contains the level of competency required to carry out the role (please refer to the Competency Framework for clarification where needed and the Job Matching Guidance). Level 1: basic level of understanding/experience and can apply it with guidance. Level 2: good level of understanding/experience and can apply it with little or no guidance. Level 3: expert level of understanding/experience and can apply, develop it and guide others.	Essential/Desirable	Level 1-3
Commercial contracts experience, including supply of goods and services contracts and IT contracts	E	3
Ability to communicate across diverse groups	E	3
Significant legal drafting experience	E	3
Persuasion and negotiation skills	E	3
Experience or understanding of the Higher Education sector	D	2
Experience advising on one or more of the following: student contracts, student placement agreements, student exchange agreements, international student recruitment agreements and/or collaborative provision agreements.	D	2
Experience advising in relation to transnational education projects	D	2
In-house legal experience	D	2

Substantive experience in one or more of the following areas of legal practice: consumer rights, intellectual property, corporate law, employment law, property, construction, litigation / dispute resolution, data protection, finance & banking.	D	2
Experience of instructing and managing external counsel	D	2
Familiarity with governance responsibilities and board engagement	D	2
Special Requirements This may include a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, regular overseas travel, driving licence, shift work.	Essential/ Desirable	
Flexibility to travel to client sites as needed.	E	
Core Competencies This section contains the level of competency required to carry out this role. (Please refer to the competency framework for clarification where needed). n/a (not applicable) should be placed, where the competency is not a requirement of the grade.	Level 1-3	
Communication	3	
Adaptability and Flexibility	3	
Customer, Client service and support	3	
Planning and Organising	3	
Continuous Improvement	3	
Problem Solving and Decision Making Skills	3	
Managing and Developing Performance	3	
Creative and Analytical Thinking	3	
Influencing, Persuasion and Negotiation Skills	3	
Strategic Thinking and Leadership	2	
This Job Purpose outlines the core activities of the role. As the Department/Faculty and the post holder evolve, the duties and focus of the role may change. The University expects the post holder to adopt a flexible approach to work, including undertaking relevant training when necessary. If significant changes to the Job Purpose are required, the post holder will be consulted, and the changes will be reflected in a revised Job Purpose. All staff are expected to: - Positively support equality of opportunity and equity of treatment to colleagues and students in accordance with the University of Surrey Equal Opportunities Policy. - Work to achieve the aims of our Environmental Policy and promote awareness to colleagues and students. - Follow University/departmental policies and working practices in ensuring that no breaches of information security result from their actions. - Contribute towards broader university initiatives that have a positive impact on student experience, recruitment and campus operations. This may include participation in cross-functional activities such as open days, confirmation and clearing, welcome week, graduation. - Ensure they are aware of and abide by all relevant University Regulations and Policies relevant to the role. - Undertake such other duties within the scope of the post as may be requested by their line manager. - Work supportively with colleagues, operating in a collegiate manner at all times. Help maintain a safe working environment by: - All staff have a statutory responsibility to take reasonable care of themselves and others and to prevent harm by their acts or omissions. All staff are, therefore, required to adhere to the University's Our Safety Policy Statement and associated Procedures.		
Organisational/Departmental Information & Key Relationships		
<u>Background Information</u>		
The University operates in an increasingly complex regulatory, legal, and governance environment, shaped by evolving expectations from the Office for Students, the Charity Commission, government departments, professional bodies, global partners, and funding organisations. As a large and diverse higher education institution with significant research activity, international collaborations, philanthropic income, and extensive student and staff communities, the University must demonstrate the highest standards of accountability, transparency, and regulatory compliance. The Governance Risk Assurance function plays a central role in ensuring that institutional decision-making is robust, legally sound, and aligned with statutory and regulatory requirements. The department provides expert leadership, assurance, and oversight across governance, legal, regulatory, and ethical domains and is critical to safeguarding the University's reputation, ensuring the integrity of institutional processes, and supporting effective governance in a dynamic and highly regulated sector.		

Department Structure Chart

