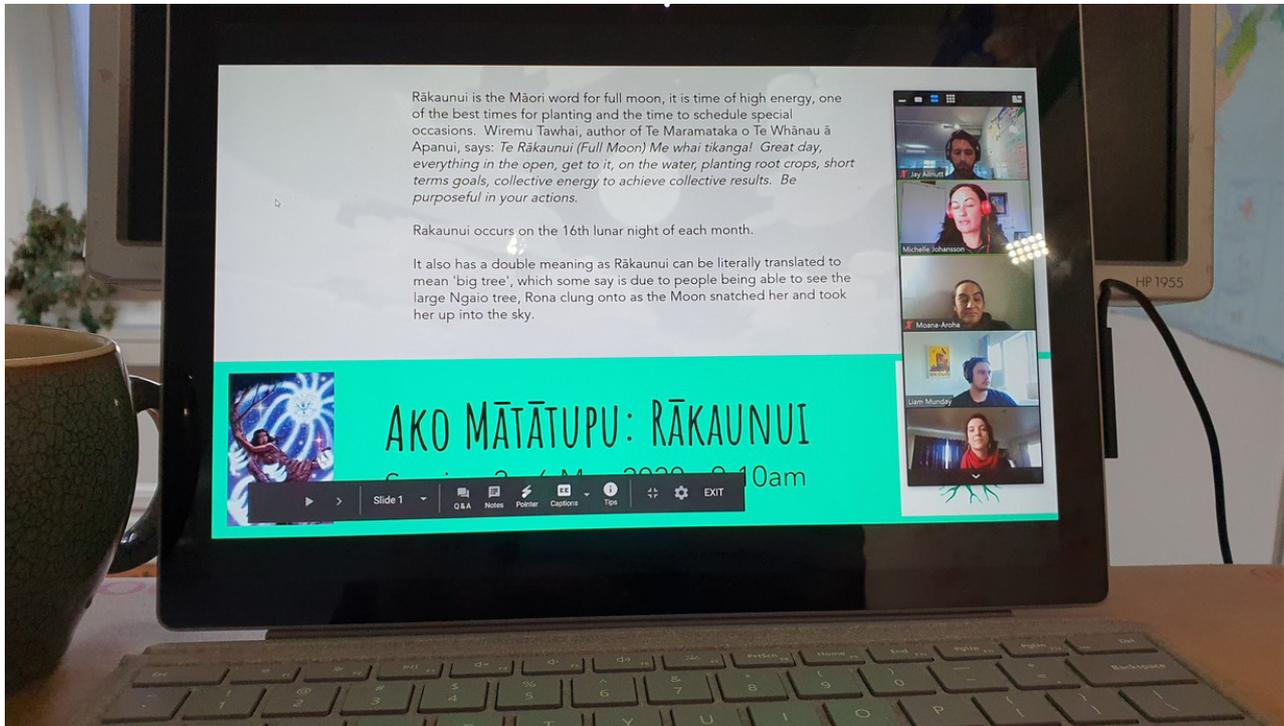


# RISING — to the — CHALLENGE

Stories from the Covid-19 crisis



*Ako Mātātupu: Teach First NZ says the Covid 19 crisis has amplified the inequities in our education system .*

## AKO MĀTĀTUPU: TEACH FIRST NZ – NEW COVID-19 CHALLENGES FOR LOW-DECILE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

*By Nicholas Moody*

The Covid-19 lockdown has amplified inequities in our education system – and presents new challenges to Ako Mātātupu and teachers on their Teach First NZ programme as New Zealand secondary schools reopen this week in Level Two.

Teach First NZ is a programme that recruits top university graduates and career changers to teach in secondary schools serving low-income communities, attracting the best and brightest into teaching. Chief executive Jay Allnutt says it is students from these low-decile schools who have struggled the most during lockdown.

“Our teachers can’t wait to get back to the chalkface and have been developing strategies that can best help students,” he says. “Many students will have had challenges learning at home and difficulty engaging with online learning programmes. These students were already disadvantaged and there is a risk they may fall further behind.

“The challenge for our teachers will be to get them engaged and back to the new normal. Our vision is to address inequity in our education system, and Covid-19 has thrown a curveball at us.”

The Teach First NZ recruits undertake an intensive eight-week training programme and then commit to an initial two-year teaching programme. “Teaching is hard, learning to teach is hard, studying towards a qualification is hard, working in a low-decile school is hard and they have to do all those things in the midst of a global pandemic, so they have four times the challenges,” Allnutt says.

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**Jay Allnutt, Chief executive Ako Mātātupu: Teach First NZ**

Fortunately, Ako Mātātupu puts its recruits through a rigorous selection process that produces resilient participants who can deal with these challenges. The 126 participants, along with alumni and others within the Ako Mātātupu whānau, have collaborated during lockdown to develop strategies when the schools reopen via a Fono - a group wide video meeting.

Its focus has been on the basics of coaching, connecting and listening to those participants who are still trying to complete the programme, while getting prepared for a return to classroom teaching, and working together with The Mind Lab, Ako Mātātupu's current tertiary partner.

Allnutt emphasises that Ako Mātātupu has not undertaken a major pivot to react to Covid-19 but has stuck to its core social justice mission.

“We already recognised inequality was systemic, we already recognised that the way to address it was through multiple actions by multiple

players, so developing new programmes to respond to Covid-19 is not the way we are going to address education equality. We are addressing it by doing what we do as well as we possibly can for the future,” he says.

Despite the uncertainty unleashed by the pandemic, Ako Mātātupu has continued to receive “significant applications” for its 2021 programme where only 10% of applicants are offered a place on the course.

The programme has maintained its selection process, making offers to 2021 participants via an online assessment model that has been rolled out through lockdown.

“We haven't lowered our expectations as we are still seeking to recruit up to 100 people for 2021,” says Allnutt. “If anything, we are upping our expectations and pushing harder. Covid-19 is going to exacerbate the issue that we were seeking to address in the first place. The last thing we should do is scale down.”

“There will be challenges in the not-for-profit sector given the economic impact of Covid-19 – but it has shown us how important our work is and made us more determined to change the system so that all young people of Aotearoa can achieve their full potential.”

The flagship 24-month Teaching and Education Leadership programme is now in its seventh year and the network of participants and alumni have served more than 30,000 students since 2012. Ako Mātātupu is supported by Ministry of Education, NEXT Foundation, Aotearoa Foundation, Woolf Fisher Trust, and many other partners.

NEXT representative Bridget Best says it is a privilege to be able to support this new wave of talented graduates who are helping students from some of New Zealand's most disadvantaged communities get back to learning after lockdown.

“Giving young New Zealanders equal access to excellent education is one of the most important roles we can play here at NEXT and the Teach First NZ programme is providing this significant support at a time of great need.”

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