

## The science of young, teenage brains and making timely career decisions

Mr Russell Booth<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Career Change Ltd

### **Biography:**

*Russell Booth has 25 years experience in the careers industry in New Zealand. He is a past President and current Fellow of CDANZ. He runs his own business Career Change Ltd in Hawke's Bay and has worked with many clients young and old. Whilst examining how to be more effective working with young clients he started investigating the research and current thinking around the neuroscience of teenage and young adult brains. This has changed his model of practice and allowed him to work with younger clients more effectively.*

We have learned a great deal about two main areas of the teenage brain in the last 15 years – the prefrontal cortex, (the CEO of the brain) and the limbic system (the emotional engine-room). From adolescence (puberty to about 18), through young adulthood (about 18 to around 25) and into later adulthood (from mid-20s onwards), the prefrontal cortex undergoes neurological changes and starts to communicate better with the limbic brain. This results in all the brain starting to function more effectively and efficiently.

The development of the executive functions and skills as the pre frontal cortex develops has an impact on a young person's 'meaning-making' ability. It will impact on their ability to process information about what they know about themselves and how they put it all together to 'know who they are.'

Science suggests development of the pre-frontal cortex varies greatly between males and females, and even with birth order in a family. What seems to be clear is that the arbitrary age of 18 may be too soon for young people to make significant decisions, including decisions about their career. It seems that early to mid 20s or even later may be a more appropriate time to make these decisions when we are better equipped through natural neurological developments and the improvement of executive functions to add new 'cognitive' software and skills to make the links and see the patterns of our lives.

How do we integrate this information into career practice? Should we know more about this science to inform our career practice? If we do, how will our practice change? Development of the brain is a complicated ongoing process that as a profession we need to know more about if we are to help more effectively in the field of careers.