ANU Micro-Credentials Summary Paper: a resource for ANU staff

1) INTRODUCTION

ANU defines micro-credentials as an intensive learning experience at the graduate level involving expert teaching, independent study, and assessment. They are primarily designed for career professionals and can be delivered online or on campus (ANU 2019a).

ANU micro-credentials (M-Cs) extend the University's professional short course offerings for graduates and career professionals and respond to business and professional need for courses which are delivered responsive to professional time constraints (New Media Consortium 2017; Business Council of Australia 2018), and which address emerging global knowledge and skill requirements. These include field-specific topics such as understanding evolving political and financial landscapes such as the rise of Asian economies and influence, the spread of digitisation, social media and associated security risks, and strategies to work with climate change (OECD 2019), as well as cross-disciplinary skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and complex information processing (Oliver 2019).

Locally, these trends have been noted in ANU professional short courses evaluations. Course evaluation surveys of 182 CCE professional short course participants over 2019 identified 75% of survey respondents wanted to receive credit for their learning, and only 25% stated that this was not important to them. 80% of survey respondents were not ANU alumnae, highlighting the interest in studying at ANU in the local market, and almost all were currently employed (98%). Preferred areas for future offerings nominated in the surveys included communication, leadership, and management, with data management and data security specifically nominated (CCE 2019).

Consistent with the ANU Strategy 2020-2023, ANU M-Cs support professional networks and policymakers at the senior level, improve accessibility of learning and increase the reach and profile of academics beyond the ANU campus. More recently, the 2020 ANU Recovery plan signalled revenue opportunity for colleges offering M-Cs and short courses and M-Cs feature as a key priority in the ANU Recovery Plan (ANU, 2020a, 2020b).

2) BACKGROUND

Micro-credentialing is a global movement addressing an increasing need for upskilling and reskilling and increased accessibility of credentialed learning. It is a response to changes in employment trends

such as the need for new skills, the need for multi-disciplinarity and the increasing number of career paths an employee will pursue over their lifetime (Oliver, 2019; Cummings, 2020).

a) Definition and scope of M-Cs world-wide

The definition of a M-C varies in different contexts, particularly regarding the standard of assessment, mode of delivery and target enrolees, but have been in existence in some form in Europe since 2012 (Cirlan & Loukkola, 2020), the USA since 2016 (Fong, Janzow & Peck, 2016), Australian universities since 2015 (Oliver, 2019) and formally recognised in New Zealand since 2018 (CAPA, 2019). The current working definition of the European Higher Education Area is:

> A micro-credential is a small volume of learning certified by a credential. In the EHEA context, it can be offered by higher education institutions or recognised by them using recognition procedures in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention or recognition of prior learning, where applicable. A micro-credential is designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills or competencies that respond to societal, personal, cultural, or labour market needs. Micro-credentials have explicitly defined learning outcomes at a QF-EHEA/NQF level, an indication of associated workload in ECTS credits, assessment methods and criteria and are subject to quality assurance in line with the ESG. (Cirlan & Loukkola, 2020, p.12)

Selvaratnam and Sankey's (2019) survey of 29 Australian, 7 New Zealand and 1 Fijian Higher Education intuitions found 22% of institutions had a micro-credentialing policy, and their 2020 paper reported an increase to 50% with a further 25% currently working on their policy. This reflects that the micro-credential market is becoming increasingly competitive, with newer institutions such as Deakin University and Macquarie University quick to participate in the field (Macquarie University 2018; Oliver 2019). However, the definition of a micro-credential varies across the local education sector, leading Oliver (2019, p. i) to call for a unified, clear definition, proposing "a micro-credential is a certification of assessed learning that is additional, alternate, complementary to or a formal component of a formal qualification". This definition was subsequently accepted by the AQF Council expert review team (AQFC, 2019).

Within participating leading Australian universities, the definition is similar. For example, the University of Sydney describes their micro-credentials as flexible postgraduate short courses designed for time-poor professionals wanting to undertake study in specialised areas and enabling the accruement of credit points towards a relevant the University of Sydney degree (USyd, n.d.). Likewise, University of New South Wales micro-credentials are described as flexible learning options involving extra assessment on top of a professional short course, leading to accruement of credit towards a postgraduate degree (UNSW, n.d.)

b) ANU M-C definition and development

Micro-credentials will connect ANU's expertise with the professional community in new ways, responsive to the changing needs of career professionals and graduate learners, as evidenced both through research literature (Oliver, 2019; Cirlan & Loukkola, 2020; Cummings, 2020) and participant survey feedback from CCE professional courses. For example, in 2019 182 CCE evaluations showed that 75% of survey respondents were interested in have their course recognised as a credential (CCE, 2019).

In 2019, the ANU formalised (ANU, 2019. p. 19) and thus present new enrolment interest and partnerships at the executive level. Coincidently, with the onset of the 2020 pandemic, the availability of M-Cs presented a priority revenue stream for Colleges impacted by decreasing Government funding and the decline in international students due to travel restrictions.

3) ANU MICRO-CREDENTIAL PILOT

To further explore the feasibility and interest in M-Cs, ANU piloted a M-C series in Semester 1 and again in Semester 2 2019, in a collaboration between ANU CCE, Crawford School of Public Policy (CSPP) and the Centre for Public Awareness of Science (ANU, 2019c). This pilot consisted of a core unit, four elective case studies and a synthesis unit: the 'Science Technology and Public Policy Series'. It was marketed to three government departments as well as APS Executives, CCE and CSPP contact lists, resulting in 40 unique enrolments from 10 government departments, of which 63% of survey respondents found out about the course from their HR departments. Not all participants enrolled in all offered units, with the Introductory unit in Semester 1 having the highest enrolment with 25 participants. In keeping with the trend of higher female enrolment in CCE professional courses, the series had 64% female and 36% male enrolees.

The weighted rating for the overall performance of the course was 4.29 out of 5, however, on average, only 35% of participants completed their assessments. 12.5% of the evaluation survey respondents reported that obtaining the credential was not important to them.

Convenors identified difficulty with the flipped classroom application to short courses as participants struggled to complete the readings and thus the pre-work (54% of participants completed the pre-work assessment submission): they recommended keeping readings to one or two essential items per case study. Feedback from participants emphasised the importance of flexibility and awareness of

workload of participants who work full time, the desire to be instructed by ANU experts in preference to group work and a need for clarity around assessment methods and processes.

3) ANU M-C PROCESSES / POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

   a) Governance

The ANU Micro-credential Policy and Procedure were approved in October 2019 and reviewed in October 2020 (ANU, 2019a; 2020c). As decided by the Micro-credential Committee, the policy and procedures set out the standards for ANU micro-credentials and the processes for accreditation and reaccreditation.

In summary, these documents specify that ANU M-Cs are to demonstrate the university's intellectual leadership in the taught disciplines or fields; hence are to be designed, taught, and assessed at graduate level (AQF level (8, 9, or 10) or course code level (7000, 8000, or 9000)), either by ANU staff, or by ANU staff in conjunction with experienced practitioners, with the assessment standard and academic integrity expectations comparative to ANU AQF courses. As such ANU M-Cs are open to graduate enrolees or those with equivalent experience. In contrast to offerings available from other institutions, all ANU M-Cs must have either an in-person or synchronous online component: they cannot be entirely self-paced. M-Cs cannot have formal pre-requisites, however, they can be organised into stacks of M-Cs, where successful completion of one offering is required to enrol in another. The process from M-Cs development to approval, delivery and badging is outlined in appendix A.

Offering participant evaluation of micro-credentials is compulsory and a three-yearly re-accreditation relies on acceptable evaluation responses (ANU, 2020d). Evaluation is the responsibility of the Colleges, however CCE has developed an Evaluation Survey if required.

   b) Credit and unit equivalence

On the successful completion of a micro-credential, enrolees can apply for credit recognition upon enrolment in a post graduate program, though enrolees are still subject to the standard enrolment pre-requisites for each program.

For ease of comparison with AQF courses, the length of a micro-credential is calibrated to a 130 hours/AQF 6-unit course,   with most micro-credentials   proposed   to   date   offered at 1 unit equivalence (21 hours with approximately 7 hours of face to face in-person or synchronous online delivery).

c) Fees

Market research conducted in 2019 by an external professional company (Proposed pricing for micro-credentials ANU, 2020f) is informing the discussion of M-C pricing. Micro-credentials cannot undercut ANU programs, but discounts may be applicable in certain circumstances.

4) PREPARATION FOR 2021 DELIVERY

In 2020 ANU Centre for Teaching and Learning developed the Troodle interface to host M-Cs (ANU, 2020e) held workshops and information sessions and developed resources to support staff to understand and develop micro-credentials. CLT held 52 information sessions and workshops about micro-credential policy, hosting and design, reaching 143 unique ANU staff attendees (see Appendix B, fig 2.) (CE report, 2021). Attendees represented 47 schools or institutes across all Colleges as well as from the National Centre for Indigenous Studies and the Office of the Dean of Higher Degree by Research.

5) 2021 M-C offerings

Over the course of 2020, the CCE hosting site for ANU micro-credentials was developed and in December was made visible to the public with 59 approved micro-credentials. This first group of micro-credentials primarily focused on data analytics in response to a request from ABS. While open for enrolment, ANU branding and marketing materials are now under development? ANU Micro-credentials will be officially launched in 2021.

CONCLUSION

ANU's groundwork so far in the micro-credential space is forming the foundation for an innovative new means of connecting with our learners, which will continue to expand and evolve in the years ahead.

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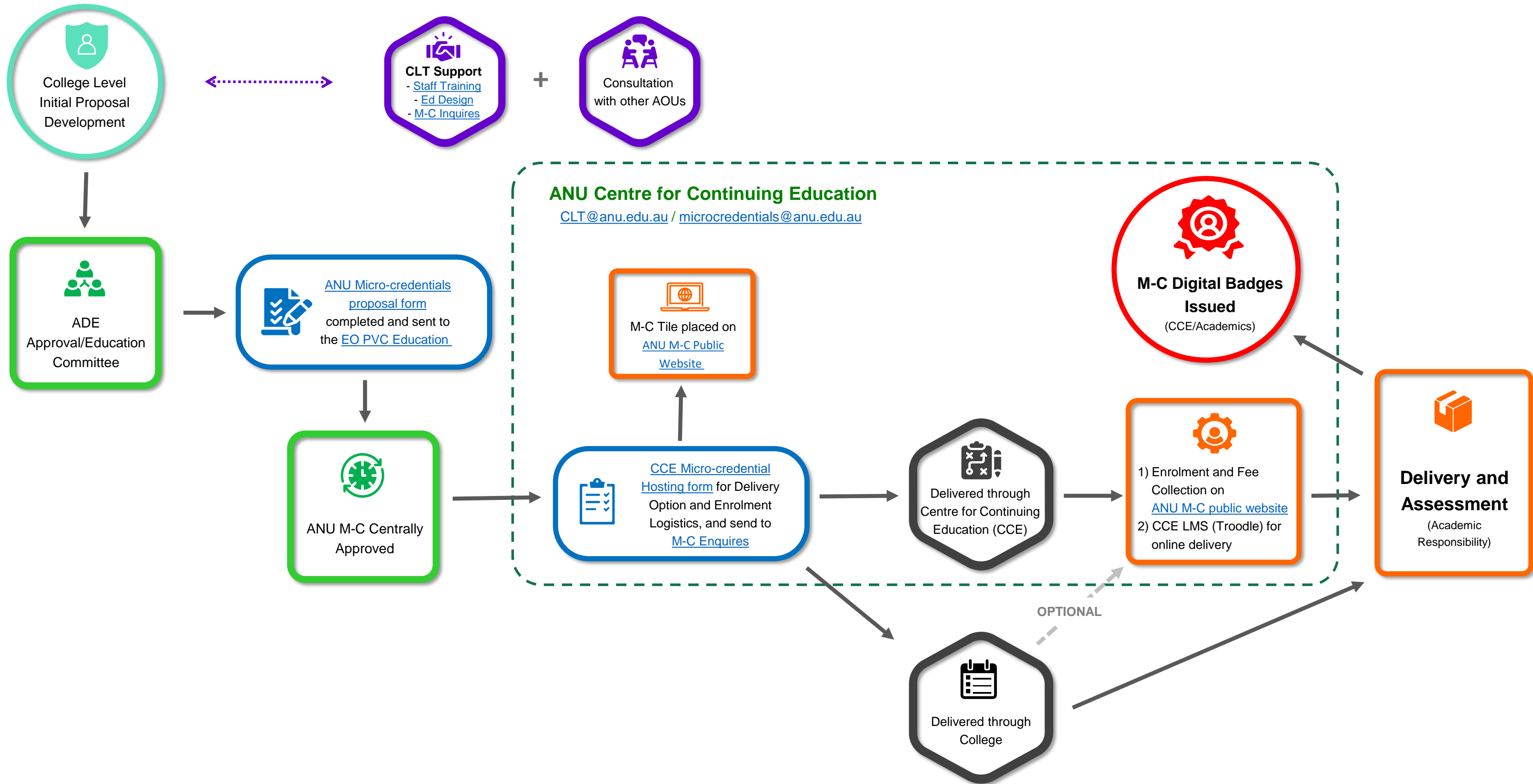Sankey M. & Selvaratnam R. (2020, August). *Survey of micro-credentialling practice in Australian universities.*

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Want to deliver an ANU Micro-credential?

College Level Initial Proposal Development

CLT Support
- Staff Training
- Ed Design
- M-C Inquires

+

Consultation with other AOUs

ADE Approval/Education Committee

ANU Micro-credentials proposal form completed and sent to the EO PVC Education

ANU M-C Centrally Approved

ANU Centre for Continuing Education
CLT@anu.edu.au / microcredentials@anu.edu.au

M-C Tile placed on ANU M-C Public Website

CCE Micro-credential Hosting form for Delivery Option and Enrolment Logistics, and send to M-C Enquires

Delivered through Centre for Continuing Education (CCE)

M-C Digital Badges Issued
(CCE/Academics)

1) Enrolment and Fee Collection on ANU M-C public website
2) CCE LMS (Troodle) for online delivery

OPTIONAL

Delivered through College

Delivery and Assessment
(Academic Responsibility)

APPENDIX A

Micro-credential approval procedure:

- The first step is the College-level generation of the initial micro-credential proposal, including consultation with other AOUs. CLT can support M-C idea development through their workshops and the [M-C resource site](#).

- The completed ANU Micro-credentials proposal form is approved by ADE who sends it to EO PVC Education.

- EO PVC Education submits proposal form to ANU M-C Governance Committee for approval.

- After the Micro-Credential Governance committee is satisfied with the proposal, the M-C convenors can begin developing the M-C offering. The ADE needs to sign off on CCE's completed CCE Micro-credential Hosting Form to generate the M-C's information tile and enrolment site on CCE's public website, and if required, the convenors' Troodle logins and trigger the development of the offering site shell. Regardless of the chosen platform or design, CLT can also assist in terms of enhancing M-C design and integration of digital tools, as per their workshops, and at-elbow assistance from Ed designers if requested.

- The M-C is advertised via CCE's website and contact list (in the case of a public M-C). The participant group can enrol directly into the micro-credentials via the CCE webpage.

- The M-C convenors deliver and assess the M-C and input the data into the gradebook for CCE to develop the digital badging for enrolees who have satisfactorily completed the course.
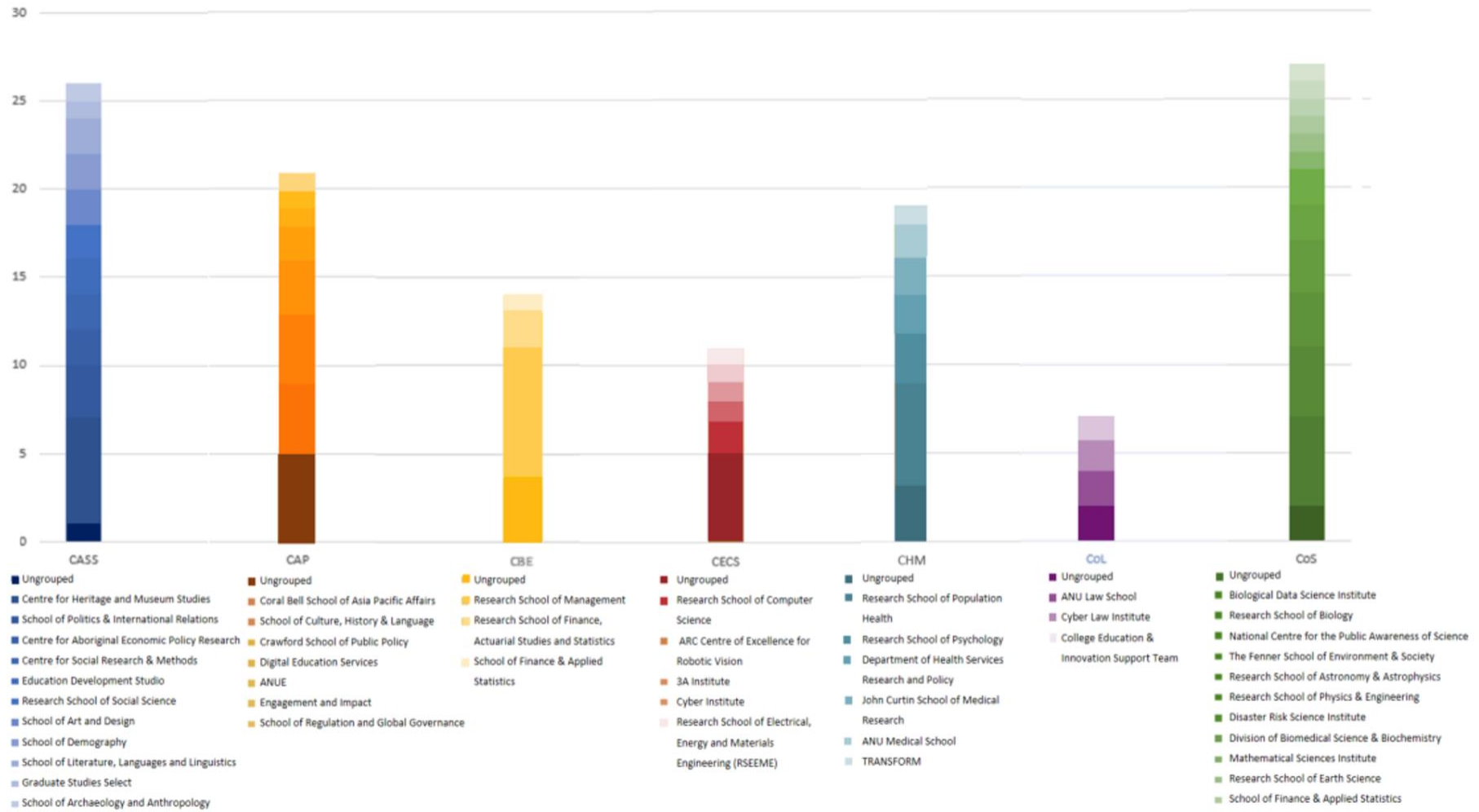
Figure 2. Colleges participating in micro-credential information sessions or workshops, 2020 (by number of unique attendees n=143).