

How does it feel to have an extension?

Experiences of Stage 1 engineering students

Introduction

Working to meet deadlines can be challenging for anyone. For students facing a range of circumstances, extension are an important tool to help them manage assessment deadlines. At the OU, a high proportion of students are in work (for modules in this study 75% are in fulltime work) and the OU is the largest provider of higher education for people with disabilities. However, previous scholarship has shown that students with extensions have poorer outcomes and are used by a higher proportion within EDIA groups (Halliwell and Brown, 2021; Doye and Hassan, 2021). Whilst there are these correlations, the student experience and equitability around extensions is not well understood.

Methodology

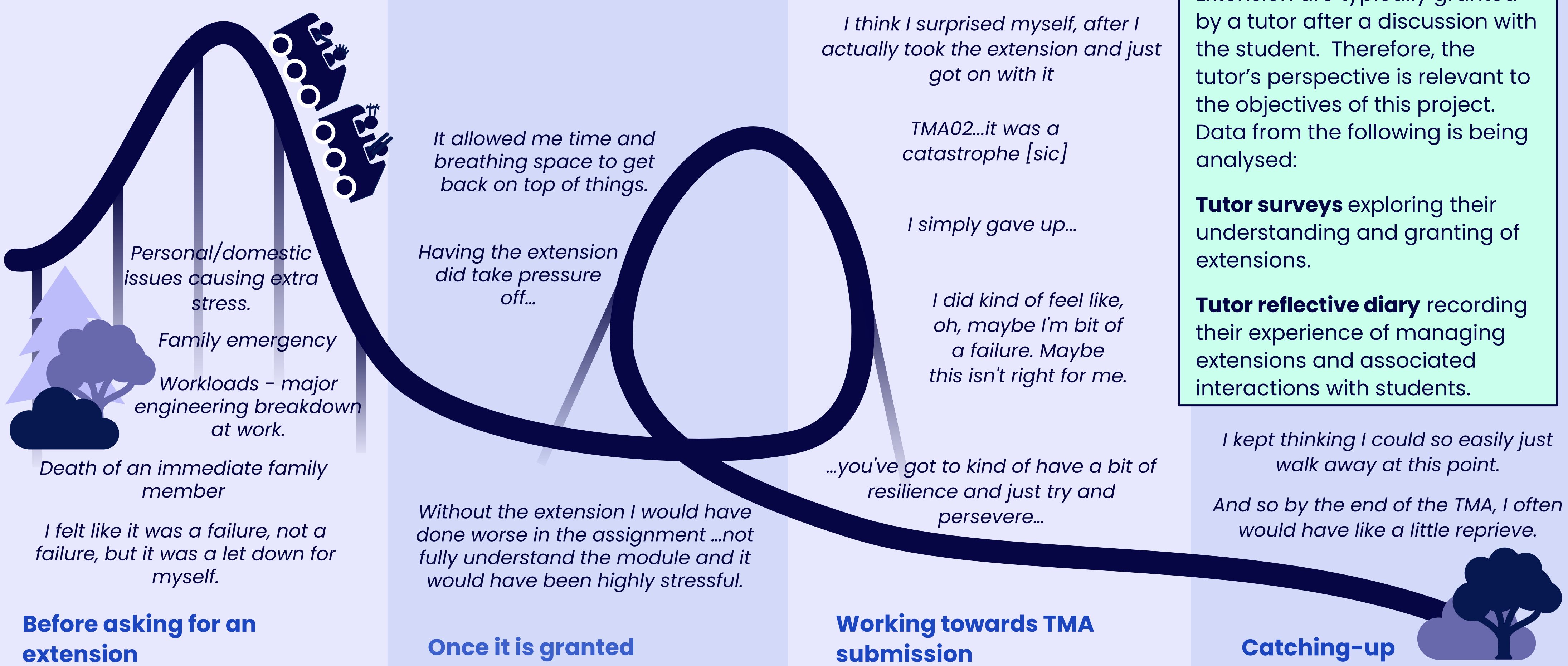
This project investigates the experiences of students on two of our Stage 1 engineering modules (T192 & T194), and has collected data in the following ways:

Student surveys exploring their understanding and use of extensions, and experience of catching up.

Student interviews exploring the journey through their current module.

Historical student profile & outcome data including use of extensions, assessment scores and module outcomes.

Figure 1: The Rollercoaster. Experiences as expressed by students travelling through the extension journey (survey and interview data).



The Tutor Experience

Extension are typically granted by a tutor after a discussion with the student. Therefore, the tutor's perspective is relevant to the objectives of this project. Data from the following is being analysed:

Tutor surveys exploring their understanding and granting of extensions.

Tutor reflective diary recording their experience of managing extensions and associated interactions with students.

Analysis

Preliminary results reveal the 'rollercoaster' of emotions associated with their use of extensions, as illustrated above in Figure 1. Additionally, thematic analysis of qualitative data is revealing further themes regarding why and whether students seek extensions, how students perceive the advantages and disadvantages of extensions, and the support they value (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Key themes defining students' experiences (survey and interview data).

Student experience of extensions

Seeking extensions

- Student circumstances are nuanced, complex and varied – no one-size.
- Lack of confidence or awareness of impact of circumstance are barriers to asking*.

Advantages and disadvantages

- Extensions help to 'park' the worry of assignments whilst they manage their circumstance.
- Students are very conscious of the downsides of extensions*.

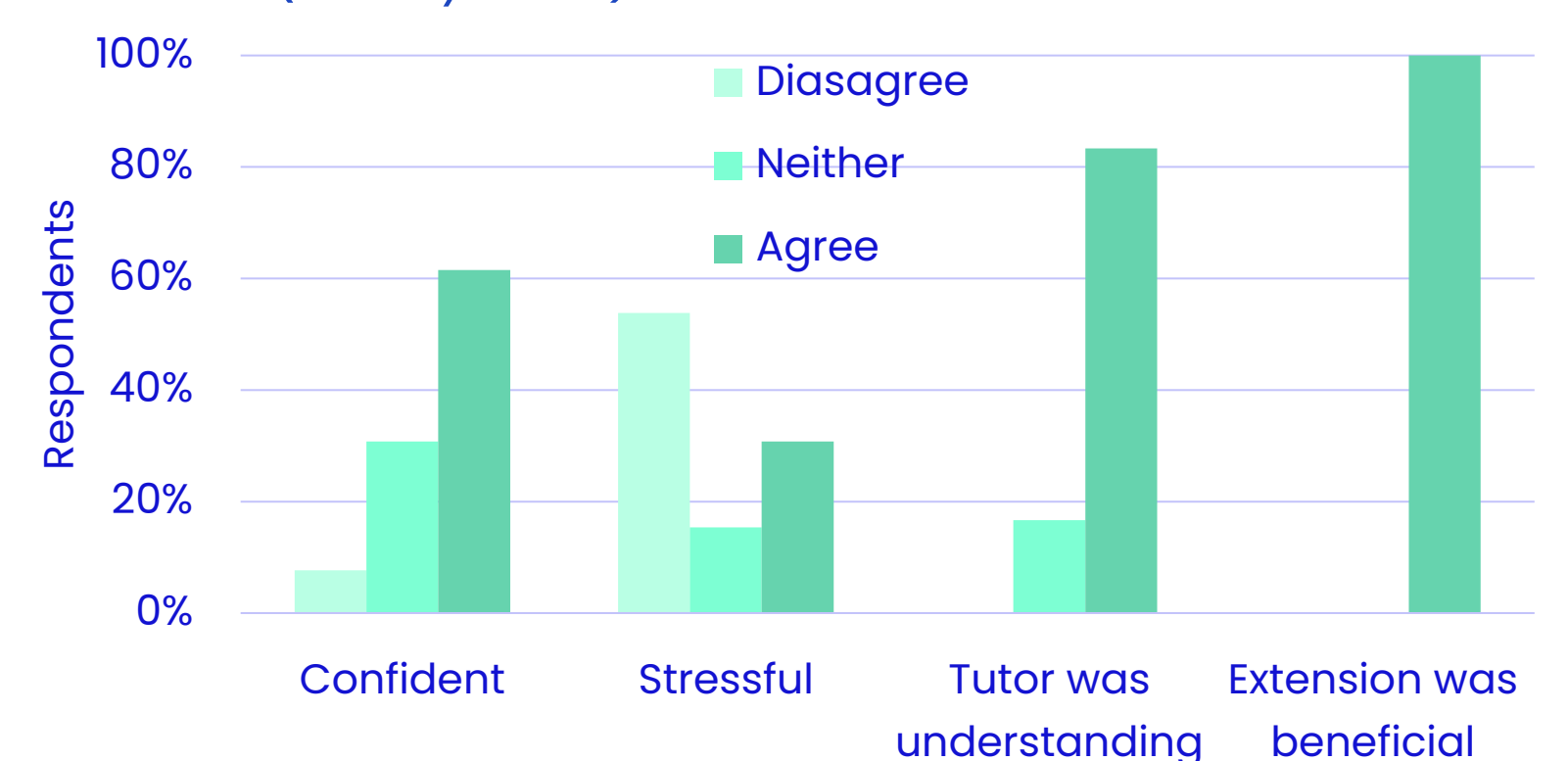
Support

- Students value support and empathy from a tutor.
- More support with time management, personal circumstances and additional requirements would be helpful.

* These observations are reflected in quantitative survey results. For example, reasons for not asking for an extension include concerns about falling behind (53%), not feeling they have a strong enough reason (47%) and not having the confidence to ask (42%).

For students who have used extensions, early analysis suggests they are individuals who have confidence to ask, most found their tutor understanding and that the extension was beneficial overall (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Students' experiences when asking a tutor for an extension (survey data).



Future Work

Further analysis will be carried out prior to publishing, disseminating and using findings to support staff development for tutors. A further project is being developed to trial interventions to improve support to students who are using, or would benefit from using, extensions.