Queen Mary University of London

Senate

Paper Title	Winter Graduations 2026/2027 and Academic Year Dates 2026/27
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to agree one of the following options for delivering Winter Graduation in 2026/27: 1. Change the academic year dates for 2026/27 in order that we can deliver Winter Graduations on campus the week before Christmas. 2. Do not change the academic year dates and deliver Winter Graduations on campus between Monday 21 and Wednesday 23 Dec 2026, and 5 to 6 January 2027. 3. Do not change the academic year dates and deliver Winter Graduation off campus, renting a venue and outsourcing venue support services (including catering and security), at a cost of over £1million. This paper describes the pros and cons for each option.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	This is a supplementary paper following the Senate meeting on 16 October 2025. As requested, this document addresses the concerns raised about the initial recommendation (above option 1) and, based on further consultation, also presents additional options available to us. The reason for bringing the original paper to Senate was because, as it stands, we cannot deliver Winter Graduations 2026/27 as we have done for the past two years. Cancelling Winter Graduation is not an option, so we need to agree a solution. This is a difficult set of choices and we are therefore seeking to agree the least worst option. Going forward, to avoid a repeat of this predicament, we will ensure that Graduation is a formal part of the Academic Year decision making.
Questions for Senate to consider	n/a

Regulatory/statutory reference points	UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI)
Strategy and risk	Strategic risks apply in the following areas: • Alumni engagement • Financial viability • Student experience
Reporting/ consideration route for the paper	SET approved the initial proposal to change the Academic Calendar on 30 September 2025.
Authors	Dr Kristian Hibberd, Director of Communications Jessica Jeske, Head of Events and Ceremonies
Sponsor	Jonathan Morgan, Chief Governance Officer

Introduction

We would like to thank Senate for engaging with this challenge, both during the meeting on 16 October and in meetings and correspondence since.

To reiterate the challenge: as it stands, we cannot deliver Winter Graduations 2026/27 as we have done for the past two years – we do not have the requisite number of days available before the final weekend before College Closure and after the first weekend of January, as this table illustrates:

	December																			January									
	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
24/25			w	w						w	w						w	w						w	w	*	*	*		
25/26		w	w						w	w						w	w						w	w						w
26/27	w	w						w	w						w	w						w	w					w	w
27/28	w						w	w						w	w						w	w					w	w	
28/29					w	w						w	w						w	w					w	w			
29/30				w	w						w	w						w	w					w	w				
30/31			w	w						w	w						w	w						w	w				

Key:

- Blue = Semester 1
- Red = Graduation delivery
- Green = University closure days (predicted for 2026/27 onwards)
- Purple = Exams
- w = weekends
- * = arranged alternative exam venue for these days

We have set out in this paper three viable options for delivering Winter Graduation in 2026/27. We have also addressed the points raised at the Senate meeting on 16 October 2025.

Option 1: Changing the Academic Calendar 2026/27

The original paper proposed changing the Academic Year dates. Having explored the points raised by Senate on 16 October, this remains a viable option.

Clarity on semester dates

The original paper references “moving the Semester 1 teaching period for 2026/27 from 21 September-18 December 2026 to 14 September-11 December.” The error in the paper was describing this as the “teaching period” when we meant “Welcome Week + teaching period”.

We apologise for this error, which was of nomenclature only. The date ranges both cover 13 weeks: Welcome week plus 12 weeks of teaching.

Currently, the semester dates are:

- Welcome Week: w/c 21 September 2026
- Teaching Semester 1: 28 September 2026 – 18 December 2026 (12 weeks)

This option is to bring the whole of Semester 1 forward by one week to:

- Welcome Week: w/c 14 September 2026
- Teaching Semester 1: 21 September 2026 – 11 December 2026 (12 weeks)

Pros

- The dates in this option would be in line with the Semester 1 dates of academic year 2025/26 when:
    - Welcome Week started in w/c 15 September 2025
    - Teaching semester 1 started in w/c 22 September 2025
- No change to the Student Experience:
    - Students could still celebrate with their friends and families on campus. Based on surveys, we know this is of importance to them.
    - Travel and accommodation costs are still reasonable. Graduations would be held the week before Christmas, with the remaining ceremonies in early January. Most ceremonies in 2025 and 2024 were sold out so there is evidence that the timeframe works for students.
- Deliver graduation within current budgets.
- No negative financial impact for Residential Services. The current semester dates result in a loss of revenue.

Cons

- Changing our 2026/27 academic year dates now would require us to inform all students who have already received an offer.
- We would also need to inform 3rd parties including the Student Loans Company.

Senate concerns

When discussing this option on 16 October, Senate raised a number of concerns which we have explored as described below. Through our work on this option, we have found a couple of additional benefits to changing the academic year dates, which we have included in the Appendix.

Impact on Kaplan foundation year students – start dates and visa issues

Kaplan students will not be adversely impacted by the recommended change of semester dates.

- Their results are published between May and Aug. Students can apply for on-campus accommodation ahead of this.
- These dates are in line with result dates for all other international students.
- The Advice & Counselling Team sees visa delays from UKVI every year, and these occur regardless of programme start dates. So, as long as programme start dates are published in advance, they can advise students to start the visa application process earlier.
- Semester 1 for this year (2025/26) began on 15 September – one calendar day later that the proposed start date for 2026/27. Neither the Global Engagement nor Advice & Counselling teams have seen any specific issues with foundation students or visas this year relative to previous years.

Impact to students on pre-sessional courses

Following the 16 October Senate meeting, STA moved back by one week the pre-sessional course dates for summer 2026, thus removing the clash with the proposed new semester dates.

Impact on Exam board dates on progression students

Beginning Semester 1 as early as 14 September is not unprecedented. Indeed, the 2025/26 academic year began on 15 September.

Decisions on progressing to the next academic year are made at the Subject Exam Boards which are held in the very late August / early September. Next year the published results day for continuing students with resits is on 08/09/2026. That's the week before the new proposed Welcome Week and almost two weeks until the start of teaching.

Difficulties that arise from late arrivals is valid and a problem every year. For example, term officially started on 22 September 2025 and we have official PGT extensions until 31 October (FMD) and 24 October (for S&E and HSS, PGT oversees students).

Impact on workload of professional services staff

We acknowledge that September is a busy month for staff given all the work that is involved because of the start of the semester.

The proposed earlier semester start date is not unprecedented. Indeed, the 2025/26 academic year began on 15 September.

The other solutions also have a significant impact on staff workload and experience.

Senate recommendation: run Graduation in tandem with teaching during the last week of Semester 1?

For graduation to take place on campus we would require: all spaces in the People's Palace, the Peston Lecture Theatre, all rooms on the 1st and 2nd floor in the Grad Centre, Octagon, Colette Bowe and Martin Harris Room, Robert Tong room, and Queens' Building Foyer.

Based on the December 2024 timetable, all of the above spaces are likely to be in use. While gowning and photography for Graduation (usually located in the Graduate Centre) could be moved to the Sports Hall, it is not a well heated space, so the experience for graduands and guests could be uncomfortable. Also, it would still require us to move all teaching activities from the People's Palace.

There is not sufficient space to move the expected level of teaching activity to other parts of campus. A previous project also looked at the feasibility re-locating all teaching activities from the People's Palace to create an event space. This was not considered feasible.

Remote teaching (both off-site and online) is not an option for international students as UKVI have tightened the rules on remote delivery (came in force on 1 September 2025) and Queen Mary has, as a result, then agreed there will be no remote delivery.

In addition, specifically for US international students in receipt of US Federal Loans, US Loan restrictions prohibit online teaching.

Option 2: Deliver Winter Graduations on campus and not change the academic year dates

There is short window when access to all venues is feasible, which means that Graduation ceremonies would take place as follows:

- Monday 21 to Wednesday 23 December
- Tuesday 5 and Wednesday 6 January

To facilitate this, the delivery teams would work Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 December, and also Monday 4 January to prepare the venue.

Pros

- No change to Semester dates.
- No impact on Teaching no January exams.
- Deliver graduation within current budgets.

Cons

- Impact on student experience as too close before Christmas, which will may add financial burden to students and their families due to expensive flights and accommodation during that period. Most students graduating are international students.
- Impact on staff experience and wellbeing due to proximity to Christmas and College Closure period.
- Potential impact on College Closure dates.
- It would negatively impact FMD activities (see Appendix)
- Potential impact on revenue for Residential services.

Option 3: Deliver Winter Graduations offsite and not change the academic year dates

Pros

- No change to Semester dates.
- No impact on Teaching and Exams.

Cons

- Comes at a high cost (£1m+), which is not budgeted for and that would need to be funded from participating Faculties.
- Outsources venue support services (including catering and security), taking work away from our internal staff who would prefer to deliver it on campus and be part of the celebrations.
- Impact on the student experience and alumni engagement: based on student feedback and regular surveys, we know that students prefer to graduate on campus.
- Suitability of the venue. The most feasible venue at this stage is Tobacco Dock. Other venues who are regularly used for graduations by other universities (e.g. Festival Hall, Barbican, Royal Albert Hall) usually need to be booked 3-5 years in advance. Tobacco Dock is also more suitable for summer events – in the past, we have received numerous complaints about the temperature in the venue.
- It would negatively impact FMD activities (see Appendix)
- Potential impact on revenue for Residential services.

APPENDIX

We would like to thank, in particular, the following colleagues for working with us over the past few weeks to explore Senate's feedback:

- Faculty Executive, Science and Engineering
- Kathryn Richardson, Head of the School of the Arts
- Martin Coward, Head of the School of Society and Environment
- Professor Simon Macklin, Interim Dean of School of Business and Management
- Professor Dan Todman, Interim VP, HSS
- Professor Liam Campling, School of Business and Management
- Professor Stephanie Marshall, Vice Principal Education
- Jonathan Morgan, Chief Governance Officer
- Karen Kroger, Chief Financial Officer
- Lee Wilderman, Director of Global Engagement
- Jasmin Bual, Deputy Head of International Student Recruitment
- Trudy Mason, Director of Registry Services
- Julie Kelly, Head of Timetabling
- Viki Soper, Head of Education and Student Experience, FMD
- Rachel Hacking, Senior International Student Advisor
- Shaoying Lu, International Pathways Recruitment Manager
- Charlotte Kendrick, Deputy Managing Director, Student Union
- Barbara Ashcroft, Head of Housing Services

Additional benefits to change 2026/27 academic year dates

MBBS Year One and Early Years

In gathering information to develop this supplementary paper, the Head of Education & Student Experience in the Institute of Health Sciences Education, Viki Soper, disclosed an existing problem for MBBS students with the existing 2026/27 Semester 1 dates.

Impact of Proposed Timetable Changes on MBBS Year One & Early Years

As part of the review of the 2026–2027 academic timetable, it has been identified that the proposed later semester start date of 21 September would result in the loss of one teaching week MBBS Year 1.

Programme leads and academic staff within the Institute of Health Sciences Education have expressed concern that this reduction would have a material adverse effect on teaching quality and curriculum delivery. Specifically, the shortened timetable would impact delivery of core sessions, including the students clinical placements General Practice 1, Clinical and Communication skills sessions, and physiology and anatomy practical sessions. These sessions are foundational to the development of core clinical and scientific competencies and are not easily re-scheduled or compressible without compromising intended learning outcomes.

Moreover, colleagues have highlighted that the proposed change would have knock-on effects on both the Graduate Entry Programme (GEP) and Year 2 teaching schedules. Curriculum Operations confirm that shared teaching between MBBS Year 1 and GEP Year 1 has already been substantially reduced due to curriculum refresh projects, changes in module scope, and the introduction of blended learning.

On the basis of these pedagogical and operational considerations, we would request that the semester start date revert to 14 September 2026. This adjustment would preserve the structure of the present Year 1 MBBS delivery, maintain alignment across programmes, and safeguard the overall coherence and quality of Year 1 teaching and assessment.

It is also not feasible to mitigate the loss of teaching time by reducing the assessment period by a week or by extending Year 1 by an additional week. The current assessment schedule is tightly constrained by the need to avoid clashes with other cohort assessments, including those for Year 2 and the Graduate Entry Programme, as well as the MLA AKT resit period. Furthermore, the post-assessment period is required for the preparation, marking, moderation, and quality assurance processes necessary for exam boards and regulatory compliance. Compressing or extending this period would therefore not be operationally sustainable and could compromise assessment integrity and quality assurance timelines.

Residential Services

The Residential Team has confirmed that Semester 1 starting on 21 September 2026 has a negative impact on their revenue generation. Moving the start date back to 14 September, allowing moving-in weekend to happen on 11-12 September, would increase revenue generation opportunity.

ENDS

November 2025