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|  | |  | | --- | | Dear colleague  **THIS WEEK'S TOP 4:  As reports shows poorest students pay most UCU calls for tax on business to abolish fees**  Students from the poorest backgrounds are leaving university with the most debt thanks to the government's decision to scrap maintenance grants, said a [report](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/26365/151504/4365/1/) from the Institute for Fiscal Studies on Wednesday. The least well-off students will graduate owing more than £57,000 in tuition fees and loans. UCU general secretary Sally Hunt told [Sky News](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/26365/151504/4366/2/) the current system was a complete mess. [UCU said](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/26365/151504/4367/3/?c73c8e04=Y2FtcGFpZ251cGRhdGU%3d&60bc612e=X2FsbC1tZW1iZXJz&560a3889=VGhlIEZyaWRheSBlbWFpbDogNyBKdWx5IDIwMTc%3d&x=396676f9) that the time had come for business to make a substantial contribution towards the cost of higher education.  **UCU welcomes labour commitment to free further education courses for life:**  The Labour party yesterday promised free further education courses at any stage of life as the centrepiece of a plan to avoid another 'lost decade' for the economy. [Jeremy Corbyn fleshed out his manifesto promise of a National Education Service](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/26365/151504/4368/4/). Responding, [Sally Hunt said](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/26365/151504/4369/5/?c73c8e04=Y2FtcGFpZ251cGRhdGU%3d&60bc612e=X2FsbC1tZW1iZXJz&560a3889=VGhlIEZyaWRheSBlbWFpbDogNyBKdWx5IDIwMTc%3d&x=1ec9acf2): 'We can continue to featherbed big business with a corporate tax regime which is more generous than countries like France, Germany and the US, or we can change direction and ask the most profitable companies to pay a bit more in order to fund access to education.' Speaking on [Question Time](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/26365/151504/4370/6/) last night, Caroline Lucas name-checked UCU's Business Education Tax (BET) which calls for increases in corporation tax to fund education.  **UCU e-ballot on higher education pay:**  The HE pay e-ballot opened on Tuesday this week. Members are being asked to make an important decision about whether to accept or reject the 'final' pay offer of 1.7%. HE members who have not received an email containing their unique voting code [should click here](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/26365/151504/4354/7/).  **Stop privatisation at the Open University:**  Despite very short notice, over 80 staff attended a 'pop-up' rally against privatisation to hear about the university's proposal to privatise IT services and move Open University staff to for-profit companies at. More than 200 staff could be affected by this plan, which UCU feels could lead to a downgrading of the systems and huge loss of essential expertise. Over 6900 people have now signed the petition, [please join them here](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/26365/151504/4363/8/).  **In the news** this week includes:   * Poorest students hit hardest by government fee reforms * Tories' tuition fee turmoil * Labour plans for a National Education Service * How zero-hours contracts are bad for your health   [​All this and more here](https://list.mercury.ucu.org.uk/t/26365/151504/4364/9/?c73c8e04=Y2FtcGFpZ251cGRhdGU%3d&60bc612e=X2FsbC1tZW1iZXJz&560a3889=VGhlIEZyaWRheSBlbWFpbDogNyBKdWx5IDIwMTc%3d&x=02492cf2).  Best wishes  Justine Stephens UCU head of campaigns | |