# Leeds Trinity investigation exposes failings in surge of subcontracted student provision



An investigation into Leeds Trinity University has revealed significant shortcomings in its management of subcontractual partnerships. Conducted by the Office for Students (OfS) between October 2022 and February 2024, the inquiry found that the university had not developed sufficient structures to manage the rapid growth in its subcontracted arrangements. The number of students enrolled through these partnerships surged from 3,600 in 2020/21 to an alarming 9,400 in 2022/23, highlighting the urgent need for effective oversight.

The OfS concluded that Leeds Trinity was ill-equipped to address the considerable risks associated with these partnerships, which are essential for delivering higher education. Notably, the institution lacked the necessary resources to monitor academic assessments conducted by its delivery partners and failed to escalate concerning issues adequately. This inadequacy raised alarms around the potential for academic misconduct and the overall quality of education provided to students. The OfS emphasised that universities retain ultimate responsibility for the educational quality and credentials of students enrolled in subcontracted courses, underscoring the serious implications of inadequate oversight in this expanding sector.

Philippa Pickford, the OfS’s Director of Regulation, stressed the critical need for universities to manage subcontractual arrangements diligently. “Universities must be certain that they are monitoring these courses effectively,” she asserted, noting that the consequences of failing to do so could jeopardise students’ success and the credibility of their qualifications. Furthermore, the OfS's findings linked the broader trend of increasing subcontractual arrangements to greater risks, including financial penalties and potential reputational damage for universities.

In response to the investigation, Leeds Trinity acknowledged its shortcomings and indicated its commitment to addressing the issues outlined by the OfS. Vice-Chancellor Charles Egbu stated that the institution is dedicated to widening access to higher education, while also recognising the pressures that rapid growth has placed on its oversight capabilities. The university has taken steps to improve its monitoring and governance processes to better protect students.

The investigation comes amid growing concerns in the sector regarding the potential for exploitation and fraud among universities leveraging franchised courses. A report published earlier highlighted a worrying pattern of fraudulent students enrolling through substandard programs to claim student loans without genuine intentions of pursuing education. The increasing reliance on subcontractors for delivering programmes has raised significant concerns about how well universities can maintain quality and integrity in education.

In light of these issues, the OfS has emphasised the necessity for rigorous management and governance frameworks that ensure students receive the necessary support and ultimately achieve qualifications of recognised value. As the landscape of higher education evolves, institutions like Leeds Trinity must navigate these challenges with care to safeguard the educational experiences of their students and uphold the integrity of their programmes.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://thepienews.com/leeds-trinity-fined-115-over-subcontractual-parterships/), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/feb/23/watchdog-to-investigate-franchise-student-provision-at-leeds-trinity)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://thepienews.com/leeds-trinity-fined-115-over-subcontractual-parterships/), [[2]](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/subcontractual-arrangements-in-higher-education/), [[4]](https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/uk-news/2024/09/03/franchised-higher-education-provision-poses-significant-risks-to-students/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/regulator-investigate-leeds-trinity-franchised-provision), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/sep/03/english-universities-franchised-courses-may-be-risk-to-public-money-regulator-says)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://thepienews.com/leeds-trinity-fined-115-over-subcontractual-parterships/), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/feb/23/watchdog-to-investigate-franchise-student-provision-at-leeds-trinity), [[7]](https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/uk-news/2024/02/22/watchdog-to-investigate-franchised-provision-at-leeds-trinity-university/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/subcontractual-arrangements-in-higher-education/), [[4]](https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/uk-news/2024/09/03/franchised-higher-education-provision-poses-significant-risks-to-students/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://thepienews.com/leeds-trinity-fined-115-over-subcontractual-parterships/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/subcontractual-arrangements-in-higher-education/> - The Office for Students (OfS) outlines the risks associated with subcontractual arrangements in higher education, emphasizing the potential for reputational damage, financial penalties, and the suspension of funding. The OfS highlights concerns such as inadequate oversight, academic misconduct, and the prioritization of financial benefits over educational quality. The document stresses the importance of effective management and governance to mitigate these risks and ensure the credibility of qualifications awarded through subcontracted courses.
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2024/feb/23/watchdog-to-investigate-franchise-student-provision-at-leeds-trinity> - The Office for Students (OfS) has initiated an investigation into Leeds Trinity University's franchised provision, focusing on courses delivered by subcontractors. The inquiry aims to assess the quality of these courses and the effectiveness of the university's management and governance over its partners. This move follows concerns about potential student loan abuse and the quality of education provided through such arrangements.
4. <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/uk-news/2024/09/03/franchised-higher-education-provision-poses-significant-risks-to-students/> - The Office for Students (OfS) has raised alarms about the risks associated with franchised higher education provision, including potential student loan fraud and inadequate support for students. The OfS has imposed additional requirements on universities and colleges with substantial subcontractual arrangements to ensure the protection of students and taxpayers. The investigation into Leeds Trinity University is part of this broader scrutiny of franchised provision in the sector.
5. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/regulator-investigate-leeds-trinity-franchised-provision> - The Office for Students (OfS) has opened an investigation into Leeds Trinity University's franchised provision, focusing on courses delivered by subcontracted partners. The inquiry will examine whether these courses meet quality standards and whether the university has effective management and governance in place for overseeing its partners. This is the first time the OfS has scrutinized franchised provision in this manner.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/sep/03/english-universities-franchised-courses-may-be-risk-to-public-money-regulator-says> - The Office for Students (OfS) has expressed concerns that franchised courses in English universities may pose risks to public money, highlighting the need for robust governance to protect students and taxpayers. The OfS has indicated that it is prepared to intervene if these arrangements are not effectively managed, as seen in its investigation into Leeds Trinity University's franchised provision.
7. <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/uk-news/2024/02/22/watchdog-to-investigate-franchised-provision-at-leeds-trinity-university/> - The Office for Students (OfS) is investigating franchised provision at Leeds Trinity University, focusing on courses delivered by the university's subcontracted partners. The investigation aims to ensure these courses are of high quality and that the university has effective management and governance in place for overseeing its partners. This follows concerns about the risks associated with franchised provision in higher education.