# OfS investigation uncovers oversight failures at Leeds Trinity amid enrolment surge in subcontracted courses



An investigation by the Office for Students (OfS) has revealed significant oversight failures at Leeds Trinity University concerning its subcontractual partnerships, which have nearly tripled in student enrolment over a two-year period. Between 2020/21 and 2022/23, enrolments surged from 3,600 to 9,400 students as the institution expanded its franchised course offerings. However, the OfS determined that the rapid growth had outpaced the university’s capacity to manage these arrangements effectively, highlighting serious concerns about the quality of education delivered under these partnerships.

The OfS noted that Leeds Trinity had not adequately responded to the risks associated with its subcontracting. There was a distinct lack of resources allocated to monitor academic assessments across its delivery partners, which in turn raised the spectre of academic misconduct—a potential breach that could have severe implications for students and institutional reputation. Philippa Pickford, the OfS Director of Regulation, stated that it is imperative for universities to carefully manage subcontractual arrangements to ensure that they uphold educational standards and provide students with qualifications that are both credible and valuable.

In light of these findings, Leeds Trinity accepted that its systems were insufficient to handle the rapid expansion of its partnerships. However, the university has expressed a commitment to addressing the OfS’s concerns, asserting that it has made progress in improving its oversight processes since the investigation commenced. Charles Egbu, the university’s Vice-Chancellor, affirmed their dedication to widening access to higher education, while acknowledging that the surge in subcontracted courses created pressures that were not adequately managed at the time.

This investigation aligns with broader concerns raised in the sector regarding franchised education, particularly the potential misuse of public funds and the risk of academic dishonesty. The OfS has expressed alarm over the growing trend of universities entering subcontractual agreements without putting in place robust governance frameworks. They have warned that unchecked growth in this area could jeopardise the quality of education and the integrity of funding, necessitating a rigorous examination of how universities operate within these frameworks.

Recent reports indicate that issues have also surfaced regarding student loan fraud associated with franchise providers, spurring calls for increased regulatory measures. The OfS has pointed out that other institutions engaged in similar arrangements should take heed of the Leeds Trinity case, as the responsibilities for maintaining educational quality and protecting taxpayer money ultimately rest with the universities themselves.

As Leeds Trinity works to rectify its practices, the scrutiny placed on its partnerships serves as a cautionary tale for other universities engaged in similar subcontracting. The OfS has underscored the importance of effective monitoring and governance in ensuring that all students receive a high-quality education that equips them for the future.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://thepienews.com/leeds-trinity-fined-115-over-subcontractual-parterships/), [[2]](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/), [[4]](https://www.keighleynews.co.uk/news/national/24560229.franchised-higher-education-provision-poses-significant-risks-students/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://thepienews.com/leeds-trinity-fined-115-over-subcontractual-parterships/), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/sep/03/english-universities-franchised-courses-may-be-risk-to-public-money-regulator-says), [[6]](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/regulator-investigate-leeds-trinity-franchised-provision)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://thepienews.com/leeds-trinity-fined-115-over-subcontractual-parterships/), [[5]](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/subcontractual-arrangements-in-higher-education/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/sep/03/english-universities-franchised-courses-may-be-risk-to-public-money-regulator-says), [[4]](https://www.keighleynews.co.uk/news/national/24560229.franchised-higher-education-provision-poses-significant-risks-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.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 courses, focusing on the quality of education and the university's management of subcontracted partners. This scrutiny follows concerns about potential student loan fraud and the effectiveness of oversight in rapidly expanding subcontractual arrangements. The OfS aims to ensure that universities maintain high standards and proper governance in their partnerships to protect students and public funds.
3. <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 raised alarms about the risks associated with franchised courses in English universities, highlighting concerns over public funding misuse and potential academic misconduct. The OfS emphasizes the need for robust governance and oversight in subcontractual partnerships to safeguard students and taxpayers. Instances of students being encouraged to enroll in courses without genuine intent and widespread academic dishonesty have been reported, prompting calls for stricter regulation and intervention.
4. <https://www.keighleynews.co.uk/news/national/24560229.franchised-higher-education-provision-poses-significant-risks-students/> - The Office for Students (OfS) has highlighted significant risks associated with franchised higher education provision, including potential misuse of public funds and inadequate oversight. The OfS has imposed additional requirements on universities and colleges that subcontract courses for a large number of students, emphasizing the need for effective management and governance to protect students and taxpayers. The investigation into Leeds Trinity University is part of a broader examination of subcontractual partnerships in the sector.
5. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/subcontractual-arrangements-in-higher-education/> - The Office for Students (OfS) has published a report examining the risks associated with subcontractual arrangements in higher education. The report highlights concerns over reputational damage, potential breaches of regulatory requirements, and the misuse of public funding. It emphasizes the need for universities and colleges to have robust management and governance structures in place to effectively oversee subcontracted courses and protect students and taxpayers.
6. <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 the quality of courses delivered by subcontracted partners and the university's governance of these partnerships. This is the first such investigation by the OfS, highlighting increased scrutiny of franchised courses in the higher education sector. The OfS aims to ensure that universities maintain high standards and proper oversight in their subcontractual arrangements.
7. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/sunday-times-franchising-investigation-media-response/> - In response to a Sunday Times investigation into subcontracted higher education provision, the Office for Students (OfS) has emphasized the need for universities and colleges to have robust management and governance arrangements to prevent misuse of public funding. The OfS has increased its oversight of franchised courses and is working closely with the Department for Education and the Student Loans Company to address these issues and protect students and taxpayers.