

Bundesminister Dr Johannes Hahn
Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft
und Forschung
Minoritenplatz 5
A – 1010 Wien

11 May 2009

Dear Bundesminister Dr Hahn

We write to you as senior members of the particle physics community in the United Kingdom, with longstanding connections to our particle physics colleagues in Austria and to CERN.

We were shocked to learn last week of the plans of the Austrian government to leave CERN. It is hard for us to understand the rationale for this decision, coming as it does at a time when scientists at CERN, including many from Austria, are about to reap enormous benefits from the start-up of the Large Hadron Collider later this year. The benefits of participating in international organisations such as CERN take many forms, from direct financial return to Austrian industries to the excitement and enthusiasm generated in young people who see their country taking a leading role in a global effort to understand the mysteries of the Universe. Furthermore, CERN is a shining example of the role that international cooperation can have in science, as evinced by the enthusiasm with which many of Austria's much poorer neighbours have sought admission to CERN in the recent past. Moreover, Europe can, with the LHC, almost uniquely boast to be clearly taking the international lead in a major frontier area of science. It is an established fact that many young people are attracted to study science by such projects, and it is inevitable that your decision to leave CERN will have ramifications for the future intellectual prosperity of your country far beyond any short-term financial savings. The technologies being developed at CERN have applications ranging from healthcare and national security through to climate change; the intellectual property of which is shared by all member states. The World Wide Web is a good example.

Since the announcement last week, many of us have been contacted by Austrian colleagues, distraught at the situation they now find themselves in. Seeing no future for fundamental research in their home country, many of these young people will seek careers in other countries. These are the very people who have a critical long-term role to play in helping Europe recover from its current economic difficulties, and Austria can ill afford to lose them. It is this younger generation that will most directly suffer from your decision.

In summary, particle physics in Europe is about to enter a new golden era which will revolutionise our understanding of the Universe in which we live. Investment by your government over a very long period of time has placed Austrian scientists in the vanguard of this exciting endeavour, and your country is poised to reap a very rich reward. Your decision to leave CERN has placed all this in severe jeopardy, and we would therefore respectfully urge you to reconsider.

Yours sincerely

Professor James Stirling CBE FRS (particle theory, Cambridge University)
Professor Phil Allport (particle experiment, Liverpool University)
Professor Richard Ball (particle theory, Edinburgh University)
Professor Roger Barlow (particle experiment, Manchester University)
Professor Grahame Blair (particle experiment and accelerator science, Royal Holloway University of London)
Professor Nick Brook (particle experiment, Bristol University)
Professor Swapan Chattopadhyay FAAAS FAPS FInstP (accelerator science and technology, Cockcroft Institute and Universities of Lancaster, Liverpool and Manchester)
Professor Ed Copeland (particle theory, University of Nottingham)
Professor John Dainton FRS (particle experiment, Cockcroft Institute and University of Liverpool)
Professor Christine Davies OBE FRSE (particle theory, University of Glasgow)
Professor Tony Doyle FRSE (particle experiment, University of Glasgow)
Professor Jeff Forshaw (particle theory, University of Manchester)
Professor Brian Foster OBE FRS (particle experiment, Oxford University)
Professor Nigel Glover (particle theory, Durham University)
Professor Philip Harris (particle experiment, University of Sussex)
Professor Paul Harrison (particle experiment, University of Warwick)
Professor Mark Hindmarsh (particle theory, University of Sussex)
Professor Peter R Hobson (particle experiment, Brunel University)
Professor Chris Hull (particle theory, Imperial College London)
Professor Ian Jack (particle theory, Liverpool University)
Professor Tim Jones (particle theory, Liverpool University)
Professor Mark Lancaster (particle experiment, University College London)
Dr Daniel Litim (particle theory, University of Sussex)
Professor Steve Lloyd (particle experiment, Queen Mary, University of London)
Professor Norman McCubbin (particle experiment, Director Particle Physics, STFC)
Professor Jordan Nash (particle experiment, Imperial College London)
Professor Andy Parker (particle experiment, Cambridge University)
Professor Peter Ratoff (particle experiment, Lancaster University)
Professor Graham Ross FRS (particle theory, Oxford University)
Professor Leszek Roszkowski (particle theory, University of Sheffield)
Professor Chris Sachrajda FRS (particle theory, Southampton University)
Professor Graham Shore (particle theory, Swansea University)
Professor William Spence (particle theory, Queen Mary, University of London)
Professor Neil Spooner (particle experiment, Sheffield University)
Professor Dave Wark FRS (particle experiment, Imperial College London and Rutherford Appleton Laboratory)
Professor Peter Watkins (particle experiment, University of Birmingham)
Professor Bryan Webber FRS (particle theory, Cambridge University)
Professor Peter West FRS (particle theory, King's College, London)

(38 signatures from all of the 24 UK institutions involved in particle physics research)