

# Scientific cost of shunning CERN

Tue, Apr 22, 2008

Madam, - I read with interest Derek Scally's article on the forthcoming experiments at CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research ( The Irish Times, April 10th).

Long the jewel in the crown of European science, CERN will truly become the undisputed world leader in the field of sub-atomic physics with the opening of the world's most powerful particle accelerator or "atom-smasher" (the Large Hadron Collider) in June.

The experiments at the new accelerator will be watched with intense interest by scientists the world over for information on the fundamental structure of matter, and on the evolution of our early universe.

Europe has reason to be proud, but Ireland has not. As Mr Scally points out, the participation of Irish scientists in historic CERN experiments will be severely limited by the fact that Ireland, almost uniquely among 20 major European nations, is not a member of CERN. For decades now, Ireland has baulked at joining this most successful of European scientific collaborations.

The omission has decimated Irish research in elementary particle physics, a field of fundamental importance in science, and sits awkwardly with our efforts to become a world leader in science and technology. It has also cost us financially, with Irish engineers and scientists unable to bid for large international contracts in high-tech software and hardware projects.

All this from a country whose only Nobel Prize in science was for splitting the atom! - Yours, etc,

Dr CORMAC O'RAIFEARTAIGH,

Lecturer in Physics, Waterford Institute of Technology.

© 2008 The Irish Times