European Organization for Nuclear Research
Organisation européenne pour la recherche nucléaire

Adresse postale / Mailing address*:

Vincenzo M. Vagnoni
CERN – EP Department
CH - 1211 GENEVA 23

E-mail vincenzo.vagnoni@cern.ch

Geneva, 12 March 2026
`

The Strategic Abandonment of UK Leadership at LHCb

Dear Dame Chi Onwurah and members of SITC,

I am writing in my capacity as the international leader for the LHCb collaboration. The LHCb experiment is a cornerstone of CERN's Large Hadron Collider, defined by its unique design and a physics programme focused on the fundamental study of matter-antimatter asymmetries. The UK serves as a primary pillar of this international collaboration, which comprises 1,870 members from 110 institutes across 30 countries. Notably, the UK accounts for 18% of this total membership. This dominant role is the direct result of the ingenuity of British researchers and a deliberate, long-term national strategy by STFC and UKRI to concentrate critical mass on high-impact initiatives rather than diluting resources.

This leadership is evidenced by a remarkable statistic: of the eight spokespersons leading the experiment since 1995, four are from the UK, outstripping the representation of all other participating nations. Since 2016, the collaboration has proposed a major detector upgrade under UK leadership. Throughout every plenary session of CERN funding agencies, STFC delegates reiterated unwavering support, pledging funding from the UKRI infrastructure fund since 2022. Consequently, the entire project was shaped by the UK's vision, eventually convincing all global partners to align with this direction.

The recent reversal of this stance by UKRI was conducted without prior consultation or negotiation with the researchers themselves, leaving the UK physics community and their international peers in a state of shock. While official communications remain necessarily polite and diplomatic, the reality behind the curtain is a severe erosion of the UK's international standing. Among the thousands of researchers around the world who, for months, have been discussing little else, it is clear that the narrative of "no impact on reputation" is demonstrably false.

Critical questions:

- Political Rationale: What is the political logic behind such a radical shift at the exact moment a British researcher holds the position of CERN Director General for the first time in 30 years? As one of the most significant scientific responsibilities globally, political wisdom would suggest backing this role to ensure maximum national return. Weakening the Director General at the start of a mandate, when they require maximal support to operate one of the world's most complex scientific infrastructures, is incomprehensible from a political viewpoint. Furthermore, how does this move reconcile with the goal of re-establishing integration with European markets, politics, and infrastructure?

- Democratic Deficit and Stakeholder Exclusion: In both democratic nations and autocracies alike, significant shifts in scientific policy typically involve the primary stakeholders. In this instance, decisions were seemingly taken by a few individuals without consulting the scientific body or fully grasping the consequences. While high-level officers cannot be experts in every field, this is precisely why stakeholder involvement is mandatory. To treat world-class researchers like children playing with public funds, while adults in administration make hard decisions in closed rooms, is an insult to the professional integrity of the UK's scientific community. This decision impacts not just a detector, but the livelihoods and futures of hundreds of UK researchers and students, as well as of those from the 29 other participating countries. How can the UK claim to be a global leader in science while simultaneously dismantling international projects through a process that excludes the very experts who built them? Given the obvious gravity of the consequences, how can we reconcile the exclusion of the scientific community from a decision of such national and international significance?

Thank you very much for your attention and fundamental work.

Yours sincerely,



Vincenzo M. Vagnoni
INFN Research Director
CERN Guest Professor
International leader of the LHCb collaboration