



# MONASH University

School of Physics and Astronomy/Astrophysics

MASTERS THESIS

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## **The Search for Axion Like Particles (ALPs) Through $B$ Meson Decays at the LHCb**

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# Abstract

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

## Chapter 2

# Background and Motivation

### 2.1 Synopsis of the Standard Model

The Standard Model of particle physics is a description of the fundamental constituents of the Universe, as well as the interactions between them. The model is composed of two main groups of particles, namely the fermions, which possess half-integer quantum spin, and make up all of the matter within the Universe, and the gauge bosons, which are of integer quantum spin, and are responsible for mediating forces between the fermions.

The fermions can be further classified into two categories of fundamental particles known as quarks and leptons. There exist six distinct 'flavours' of quarks, which are ascribed the names up, down, charm, strange, top and bottom, denoted,  $u, d, c, s, t$  and  $b$  respectively. These are grouped into three 'generations' based on their electromagnetic charge and mass. Free quarks are never observed in nature due to a principle known as quark confinement, which mandates that these particles (and their antiparticles) should exist as bound states known as baryons and mesons (which are collectively referred to as hadrons). Quarks can interact via all of the abovementioned forces. The leptons are grouped similarly by flavour, with each generation containing a negatively charged particle and a corresponding neutrino whose electromagnetic charge is zero, and is, to a large extent, massless. The three different flavours of leptons, in ascending order of their masses, are the electron, muon and tau, denoted  $e^-, \mu^-,$  and  $\tau^-$  respectively. The charged leptons can only partake in electromagnetic and weak interactions while the neutrinos can only participate in weak processes.

Three of the four fundamental forces of nature (i.e. the strong, electromagnetic and weak forces) are accounted for in the Standard Model, as evident through the presence of vector (spin 1) gauge bosons such as the gluon ( $g$ ), photon ( $\gamma$ ), and charged  $W$  and neutral  $Z$  bosons, which mediate the aforementioned forces respectively. The model also describes a spin-0 particle, known as the Higgs boson, which, through the mechanism of spontaneous symmetry breaking, is responsible for the Standard Model particles acquiring their mass. A spin-2, massless boson, known as the graviton has also been hypothesised as a mediator of the gravitational force. However, there is no experimental evidence of this to date. Figure 2.1 provides a visual summary of the model that has been described above.

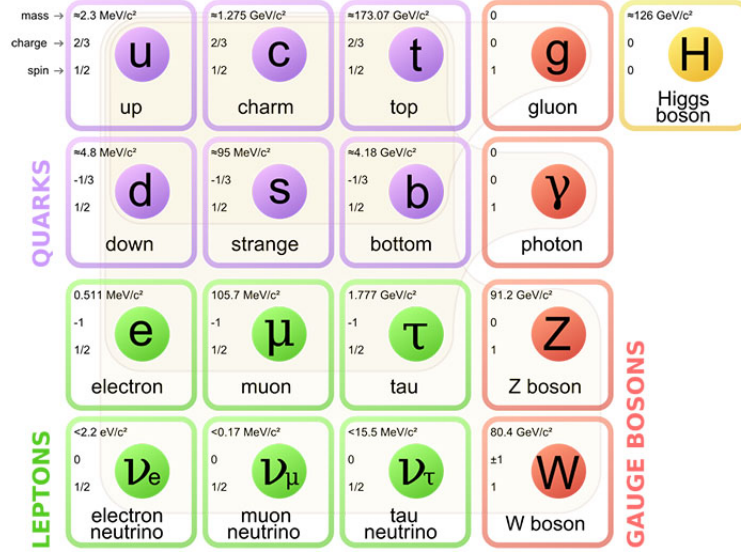


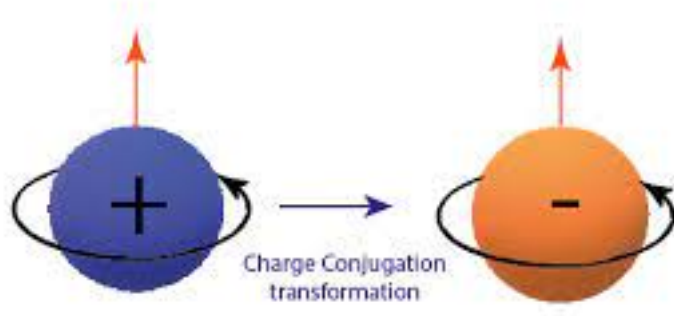
Figure 2.1: The particles of the Standard Model, grouped based on their quantum spin into gauge bosons and fermions (particles that make up all matter). The fermions are further divided into quarks and leptons which are fundamental, and can partake in various interactions that are mediated by the gauge bosons corresponding to each of the three fundamental forces described by the model. The Higgs boson is also included, and is responsible for all of the particles acquiring their mass.

Despite providing a comprehensive description of the fundamental components of nature and the force acting between these, the Standard Model is subject to numerous limitations, the most prominent of which is its inability to account for the gravitational force. Furthermore, the nature of dark matter and dark energy, which account for a large proportion of the matter in the Universe, is not fully understood, and remains an area of ongoing research. A more subtle limitation, however, pertains to a phenomenon known as CP violation and the absence of experimental evidence of this in the strong force, despite being theoretically permissible by the quantum field theory of this force, known as quantum chromodynamics (QCD). This is known as the Strong CP problem and forms the basis for motivating particles such as the axion, as well as Axion-Like Particles (ALPs), both of which are described in further detail in the sections that follow.

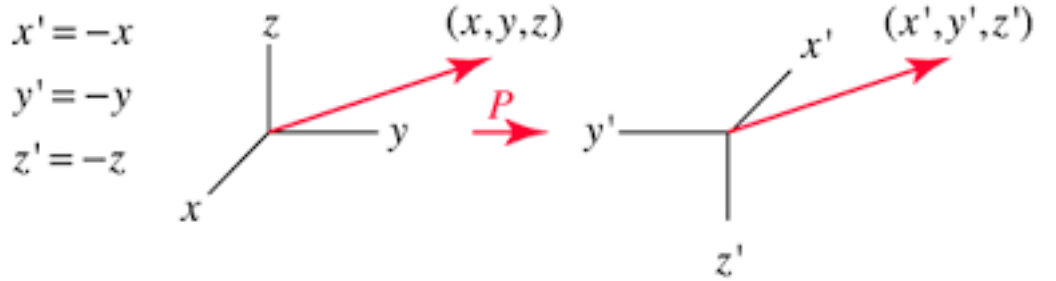
## 2.2 CP Violation

The principle of symmetry (i.e. the invariance of a physical system under a transformation) is significant in the study of particle physics. Two symmetries that are of particular interest are those of charge conjugation, denoted  $C$ , and parity, denoted  $P$ . Charge conjugation is a transformation wherein particles within a physical system are interchanged with their antiparticles, as demonstrated in Figure 2.2a, while parity refers to the inversion of spatial coordinates of a physical system, as illustrated in Figure 2.2b below.

The combination of the abovementioned transformations is referred to as  $CP$ , and its violation is of particular interest as it provides a possible explanation for the abundance of matter over antimatter in the Universe. CP symmetry has been observed to be preserved in electromagnetic interactions, whilst being violated in weak interactions, as demonstrated by a study of the decay of neutral kaons by Cronin and Fitch in 1964. While the theory of QCD permits the violation of this symmetry in the strong force, there is no experimental evidence of processes that violate this symmetry. This is referred to as the Strong CP problem, and is essential for the theoretical motivation behind axions and ALPs.



(a) The charge conjugation transformation  $C$ , which interchanges particles in a physical system with their corresponding antiparticles.



(b) An illustration of the parity transformation  $P$ , corresponding to the inversion of spatial coordinates in a physical system

### 2.2.1 The Strong CP Problem

The theoretically permissible nature of CP violation in the strong force is evident within the QCD Lagrangian, which can be written in the following form:

$$\mathcal{L}_{QCD} = -\frac{1}{4}G_{\mu\nu}G^{\mu\nu} - \frac{g_s^2\theta}{32\pi^2}G_{\mu\nu}\tilde{G}^{\mu\nu} + \bar{\psi}(i\gamma^\mu D_\mu - me^{i\theta'\gamma_5})\psi \quad (2.1)$$

where  $G_{\mu\nu}G^{\mu\nu}$  represents the gluonic field strength tensor, which is the QCD equivalent of the electromagnetic field strength tensor,  $F_{\mu\nu}F^{\mu\nu}$ , and  $\tilde{G}^{\mu\nu}$  is its dual. By inspection, it is evident that the terms  $\theta$  and  $\theta'$  in Equation 2.1 are CP-violating, as they both change sign under a parity transformation. The effects of these terms, which can be interpreted as physical angles, are not experimentally observed, thereby suggesting that these angular terms are infinitesimal in magnitude. The angular terms  $\theta$  and  $\theta'$  can be combined to form a total effective angle, labelled  $\bar{\theta}$ . The absence of CP violation in the strong force suggests that  $|\bar{\theta}| \approx 0$ . This is supported by the experimental measurement of the electric dipole moment (EDM) of the neutron, which impose the constraint  $|\bar{\theta}| < 10^{-10}$ . This is referred to as a fine-tuning problem, wherein the value of  $|\bar{\theta}|$  is constrained to be as small as possible through the tuning of other parameters.

A more elegant solution to the Strong CP problem was proposed by Peccei and Quinn in 1977. This solution involved promoting  $\bar{\theta}$  to a dynamic field, thereby introducing a spatial and temporal dependence, along with an associated potential. This field is postulated to have an associated global symmetry, known as the Peccei-Quinn (PQ) symmetry. Spontaneous breaking of this symmetry mandates that  $|\bar{\theta}| = 0$ , thereby resolving the Strong CP Problem without the need of fine-tuning. This solution results



in the introduction of the axion, which in turn leads to the motivation of Axion-Like Particles (ALPs) through the similar mechanism of spontaneous symmetry breaking.

### 2.2.2 Spontaneous Symmetry Breaking

## 2.3 Axions

Spontaneous breaking of the PQ symmetry described in Section 2.2.1 mandates the introduction of a light, pseudoscalar (spin-0 and odd parity) particle known as the QCD axion. Axions obey a well-defined relation between their mass and coupling to Standard Model particles. For instance, the coupling constant  $f_A$  of the axion-photon coupling in one of the many axion models is inversely proportional to the mass of the axion,  $m_A$ , as demonstrated in the relationship represented in Equation 2.2 below

$$f_A m_A = f_{\pi^0} m_{\pi^0} \quad (2.2)$$

where  $f_{\pi^0} = 92$  GeV and  $m_{\pi^0} = 135$  MeV correspond to the mass and coupling strength to photons of the neutral pion,  $\pi^0$ , respectively.

## 2.4 Axion Like Particles (ALPs)

Spontaneous breaking of other symmetries similar to the Peccei-Quinn symmetry described in Section 2.2.1 produces particles similar to the axion, referred to as *axion-like particles* (which will henceforth be referred to as ALPs, or  $a_0$  in decays). Unlike axions, which are expected to be very light (i.e. within the sub-eV regime), the masses of ALPs are not as constrained, thereby implying that these can be arbitrarily heavy. Furthermore, Axion-Like Particles are able to couple to pairs of gauge bosons (e.g.  $\gamma\gamma, gg, HH$ ) as well as fermions (i.e. leptons and quarks) depending on the model being considered, and are not solely linked to the strong interaction like their counterparts.

ALPs are of significant importance to advancements in various fields of physics, particularly cosmology. The feeble nature of the interactions between ALPs and Standard Model particles makes them ideal dark matter candidates. In addition to this, they are believed to be able to offer an explanation of the anomalies in the energy loss of white dwarf stars. Their existence can also offer an explanation of the observational hints on extra dark radiation in the primordial plasma during big bang nucleosynthesis in the form of Cosmic ALP Background (CAB) radiation. Thus, a multitude of experimental methods and strategies have been employed to search for these particles, the most prominent of which include haloscope searches, Light-Shining-Through Wall (LSW) searches, and helioscope searches. These techniques, along with the constraints that they have imposed on the masses and couplings of ALPs to Standard Model particles are summarised in the sections that follow. The general search strategy and constraints imposed by collider experiments are also summarised in these sections. This, with an enhanced focus on the Large Hadron Collider beauty (LHCb) experiment, will be the primary emphasis of the remainder of this work.

## 2.5 Experimental Searches for Axions and ALPs

Since light pseudoscalars are theorised to naturally couple to photons, due to spin-selection rules and mass constraints, the searches for ALPs performed through cosmological and astrophysical observations, as well as those being conducted at low-energy accelerators exploit the (inverse) Primakoff effect, wherein axions are converted to photons (and vice versa) in collisions with photons, or identically with electromagnetic fields [1]. This is the case with the experimental search strategies that are summarised below, namely the Light Shining through Walls (LSW) experiments, helioscope, and haloscope searches

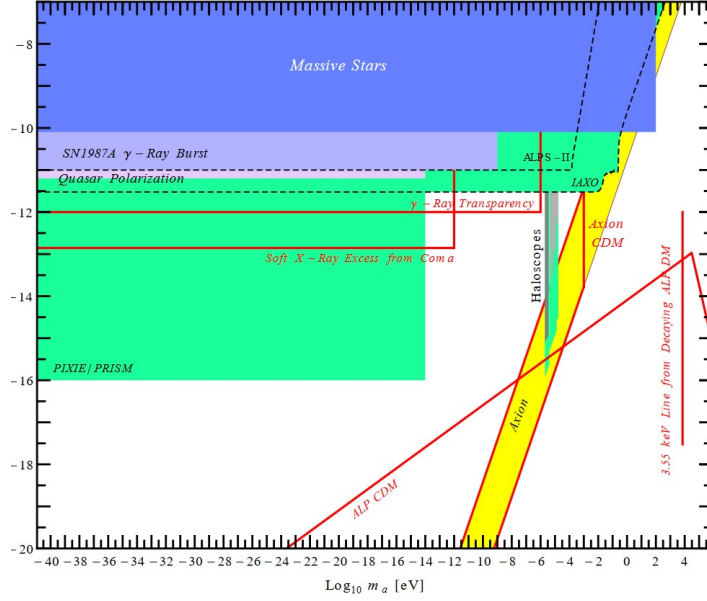


Figure 2.3: Plot displaying the constraints imposed on the masses and coupling strengths of ALPs to photons by a variety of experiments, such as LSW, helioscope, and haloscope searches (such as ALPS-II and ADMX respectively). Of particular interest are the constraints imposed by the LSW experiments ALPS-II, as well as the helioscope limits expected to be set by IAXO. The bright yellow band indicates the prediction for the axion

### 2.5.1 Light Shining Through Walls (LSW) Searches

LSW experiments are intended to produce and detect ALPs in the laboratory by sending laser photons along a strong magnetic field, thereby allowing for their conversion into ALPs towards a blocking wall, behind which these might reconvert into photons, once again in the presence of a strong magnetic field. These photons are susceptible to detection. Currently, the best sensitivity of LSW experiments has been established by the Any Light Particle Search (ALPS I) experiment located at DESY. A successor experiment, known as ALPS II, has also been designed with a high-power laser system, and stronger magnets. The experiment intends to probe the ALP parameter space that is favoured by astrophysical observations. However, the ability of LSW experiments to probe other spectral ranges, particularly in the microwave and X-ray ranges are still in the early stages of development, and are unlikely to yield significant results in the foreseeable future

### 2.5.2 Haloscope Searches

Haloscopes directly search for galactic halo dark matter axions and ALPs in the laboratory. The most sensitive of these experiments aim to detect the electromagnetic power which is generated from the conversion of dark matter axions and ALPs into detectable photons. The optimal sensitivity is achieved on resonance, at which point the power output is proportional to the quality factor of the cavity. One experiment that has attained a sensitivity to probe axion dark matter is the Axion Dark Matter Experiment (ADMX). The constraints on the masses and couplings of ALPs to photons set by this experiment are indicated by the vertical green band labelled 'Haloscopes' in Figure 2.3 above. The figure also indicates the constraints on the same parameters set by other haloscope experiments such as those performed at the PIXIE and PRISM CMB observatories [6]. Experiments with higher sensitivities than the ADMX, named ADMX (HF) and ADMX-II, which constitutes an upgrade to the existing ADMX experiment, are also proposed in order to further probe the green regions in Figure 2.3 above. Further information on the status of these experiments, including details of their design and structure are detailed in [2] and [4]. There is also scope to probe other mass ranges through the recycling of available microwave cavities and magnets at accelerator laboratories [6]

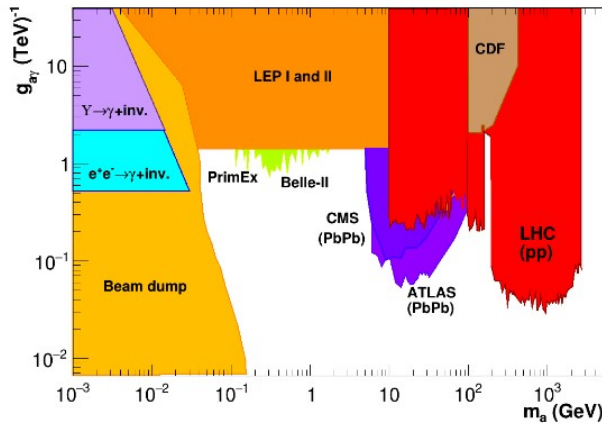
### 2.5.3 Helioscope Searches

Helioscopes are designed to detect solar ALPs (i.e. the ALPs that are produced in the Sun). The detection occurs through the conversion of the ALPs into photons, which is facilitated by a strong magnet that is directed at the Sun. Presently, an helioscope named the International Axion Observatory (IAXO), which has been modelled largely based on its predecessor, the CERN Axion Solar Telescope (CAST), with enhancements made to the design in the form of a superconducting toroidal magnet and a larger aperture, as well as a detection system consisting of large X-ray telescopes coupled to ultra-low background X-ray detectors, and a large, robust tracking system. These are intended to probe the regions labelled 'IAXO' in Figure 2.3 above. Further details on the design and operation of the IAXO experiment, including details pertaining to a smaller scale experiment known as the BabyIAXO, can be found in [3].

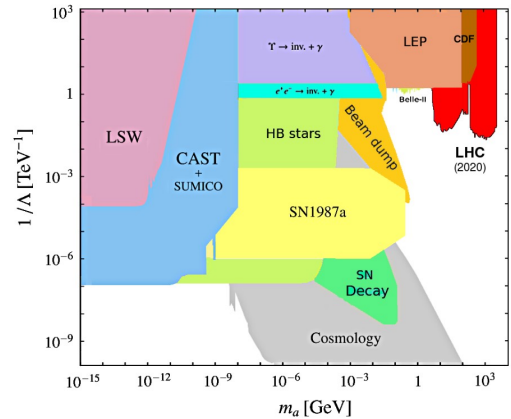
### 2.5.4 Collider Searches

As a consequence of the (inverse) Primakoff effect, described in further detail in [5], the ALP searches conducted at colliders aim to exploit the coupling of these particles to photons by examining decays which contain photons either in their initial or final states [1]. This permits for a link to be established with the various other search strategies described above. Furthermore, the identification of these decays over intrinsically large hadronic backgrounds becomes simpler, thereby suggesting that collider searches provide a strong prospect for probing different regions in the  $(m_a, g_{a\gamma})$  parameter space to those containing the limits set by other search methods [1].

Recently, collider experiments have aimed to focus their attention on ALP masses above the MeV scale. The decay rate of  $a_0 \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$  is dependent on the third power of the ALP mass, the decay rate diminishes such that the ALP leaves the detector and appears as an invisible particle as its mass increases. There also exist fixed-target proton and electron experiments wherein photons are produced by meson decays or bremsstrahlung respectively. The photons that are present in the final state of each of these processes can convert into ALPs via the Primakoff process off a nuclear target. The inverse Primakoff process is exploited when the decay mode  $a_0 \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$  is probed for the presence of ALPs. Various collider experiments have aimed to constrain the masses and couplings of ALPs to photons through a multitude of decay modes, the most prominent of these being CLEO and BaBar, where mono-photon final states with missing energies from long-lived "invisible" ALPs with via radiative decays are investigated, as well as diphoton and triphoton final states, as examined by the LEP-I and LEP-II experiments via, for instance, the decay mode  $e^+e^- \rightarrow \gamma a_0$  (where  $a_0 \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$ ). Each of the experiments described above probes a different region in the  $(m_a, g_{a\gamma})$  parameter space. The constraints imposed on these parameters is summarised in Figure 2.4a below



(a) Plot showing the collider constraints on the masses and coupling strengths to photons of ALPs



(b) Plot showing the constraints described in Section 2.5. The constraints imposed by collider experiments are visible on the far right of the diagram, with those from the other experimental methods impose limits on different regions of the  $(m_a, g_{a\gamma})$  parameter space

## **2.6 The $B \rightarrow K^* a_0, a_0 \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$ Decay Process**

### **2.6.1 Flavour Changing Neutral Currents**

### **2.6.2 Electroweak Penguin Decays**

## Chapter 3

# The LHCb Detector

The LHCb (Large Hadron Collider beauty) experiment is one of the detector experiments that forms a part of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), located at CERN in Geneva, on the Franco-Swiss border. It is an experiment that is designed to investigate the phenomenon of CP violation in hadrons containing the  $b$  (bottom, or beauty) quark. Studies at this detector aim to account for various physical conundra, the most prominent of which is the observed abundance of matter over antimatter in the Universe. The detector is also able to perform measurements pertaining to charm and electroweak processes, and has a  $b\bar{b}$  production cross-section of approximately  $500 \mu b$  at an energy of 13 TeV, making it the most abundant source of  $B$ -mesons in the world. This chapter is intended to provide the reader with an overview of the structure of the detector, with an emphasis on the components that are relevant for the analysis of the  $B \rightarrow K^{0*} A$ ,  $A \rightarrow \gamma\gamma$  decay channel, the significance of which has been described in Chapter 1. The section also contains a brief overview of the analysis of the detector data, its flow, the various software modules that are responsible for its processing and analysis, and the framework within which these are implemented.

### 3.1 Structure of the LHCb Detector

The LHCb is a single-arm spectrometer whose forward angular coverage encompasses the range from approximately 10 mrad to 300 mrad in the bending (non-bending) plane, and whose pseudorapidity,  $\eta$ , lies in the range  $2 < \eta < 5$ . The detector is designed such that the  $b$  and  $\bar{b}$  hadrons are produced within the same forward or backward cone at high energies. The detector comprises a high-precision tracking system, which is responsible for the measurement of the properties of the particles that traverse the detector, such as their momenta and electric charge. The tracking system comprises of four main components, namely the vertex locator, (VELO), the two Ring Imaging Cherenkov (RICH) detectors, magnet, and hadronic and electromagnetic calorimeters. Of the aforementioned components (commonly referred to as subdetectors), those that are relevant for the analysis of the decay channel of interest, namely the VELO, magnet, and the Electromagnetic Calorimeter (ECAL), are described in further detail in the sections that follow.

#### 3.1.1 Vertex Locator (VELO)

The Vertex Locator (VELO) is a silicon microstrip detector that surrounds the proton-proton interaction region in the experiment. It is responsible for providing measurements of track coordinates that enable the identification of the primary and secondary interaction vertices, the latter of which is characteristic of beauty and charm hadron decays. The VELO was designed to optimise five major aspects of the LHCb, namely the angular coverage, triggering of events, reconstruction efficiency, displacement of

tracks and vertices, and the decay time of particles that traverse the detector. The significance of each of these aspects is summarised below

**Angular Coverage**

**Triggering**

**Reconstruction Efficiency**

**Displaced Tracks and Vertices**

**Decay Time**

The decay time of a particle is obtained from the measurement of its flight distance in the VELO. This is essential for time-dependent measurements in the rapidly oscillating  $B_s^0$ - $\bar{B}_s^0$  meson system

### 3.1.2 Ring Imaging Cherenkov (RICH) Detector

### 3.1.3 Magnet

### 3.1.4 Electromagnetic Calorimeter (ECAL)

## 3.2 Data Analysis at the LHCb

Data collection at the LHCb detector is divided into periods known as fills and runs. A fill is a single period of collisions separated by the announcement of stable beam conditions and the dumping of the beam by the LHCb. Such a phase typically lasts approximately 12 hours. A fill can be subdivided into runs, each of which lasts a maximum of one hour. The high event rate at the LHCb mandates a high-bandwidth data acquisition system, along with a robust, and selective trigger system. The flow of data through this trigger system, along with its various constituent hardware and software-level components are described in further detail in this section

### 3.2.1 The LHCb Data Flow

The LHCb is provided with approximately 40 million proton-proton collisions by the LHC every second, amounting to approximately 1 TB of storage data each second. In order to optimise the further processing of this data, it must first be filtered so as to retain only the events pertaining to the phenomena of interest. This is first performed through the *trigger*, which is divided into two stages, namely the L0 trigger and the high-level trigger (HLT). The former is implemented in hardware, while the latter operates at the software level, and is implemented in an application known as Moore. This triggered data is then reconstructed to transform the hits of particles incident on the detector into objects such as tracks and clusters, using an application known as Brunel. These objects are stored in an output file in a 'DST' format. Despite being suitable for analysis, such files are often inaccessible to users due to the imposition of computing restrictions. Hence, the data is further filtered through a set of selections known as *stripping*, which is handled by an application known as DaVinci, the output file of this step being produced in a micro-DST (or  $\mu$ -DST) format

### 3.2.2 The LHCb Simulation Framework

A large number of Monte Carlo (MC) events are produced in parallel to the detector data. These are processed in a similar manner to the real data, the key difference being the two simulation steps that replace the proton-proton collisions and the detector response, which are controlled by applications known as Gauss and Boole respectively. The analysis of the decay of the resultant particles from the former simulation requires Gauss to call various Monte Carlo generators such as PYTHIA and POWHEG. The decay of these particles is controlled by the EvtGen and Geant4 applications. The architecture of each of these applications is briefly described below

#### Gauss

The Gauss framework is constructed analogously to the other LHCb software applications (i.e. using the general Gaudi data-processing framework). The Gaudi framework assists in the configuration of algorithms and tools within the application, and also controls the flow of data in the event loop. The Gauss framework has two key purposes, namely to control the generation of collisions (in most cases, proton-proton collisions) with Pythia, where a specific LHCb configuration is implemented, and to propagate generated particles through the experimental apparatus, and to simulate the physics processes within the sub-detectors using the Geant4 toolkit, which mimics the response of sub-detectors when a particle propagates through them.

#### EvtGen

The EvtGen package is an event generator that is designed for the simulation of the physics of  $B$ -meson decays. The package provides a framework to handle complex sequential decays and CP violating decays. The simulation of particle decays takes place through analysis of decay amplitudes, rather than probabilities. The

#### Pythia

The Pythia program is a standard tool for the generation of high-energy collisions, comprising a coherent set of physics models for the evolution from few-body hard processes to complex multihadronic final states. hard processes and models for initial and final-state parton showers, multiple parton-parton interaction, beam remnants, string fragmentations and particle decays. One can integrate its usage with other applications due to its various utilities and interfaces to external programs. While its predecessors were written in Fortran, the present version of the software, namely Pythia 8, represents a complete rewrite in C++. Currently, the program only works with  $pp$ ,  $e^+e^-$ ,  $\bar{p}p$  and  $\mu^+\mu^-$  pairs.

#### Geant4

#### Boole

## **Chapter 4**

# **Experimental Methods**



## **Chapter 5**

### **Results**

## **Chapter 6**

## **Discussion**

# Conclusion

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