

Money offered for final frontier firms

By Adrian Weckler

Irish software firms are being urged to enter the space race, according to a leading consultant.

Danny Gleeson of Athlone-based space consultancy G&L Technologies said that the Irish government wants to increase its annual contribution to the European Space Agency (ESA), but needs the prospect of ESA contracts to Irish firms to justify the move.

"The government invests between €10 million to €15 million every year in the ESA,

which is double what it used to five years ago," said Gleeson.

"The annual ESA budget is €3 billion, of which €400 million goes on technology, research and development.

"But a member country's companies can only get contracts back to the value of what it has invested."

Gleeson said that Irish firms were often not recouping the full value of these contracts.

"The government is trying to increase its contribution, so we're trying to get more companies involved," he said.

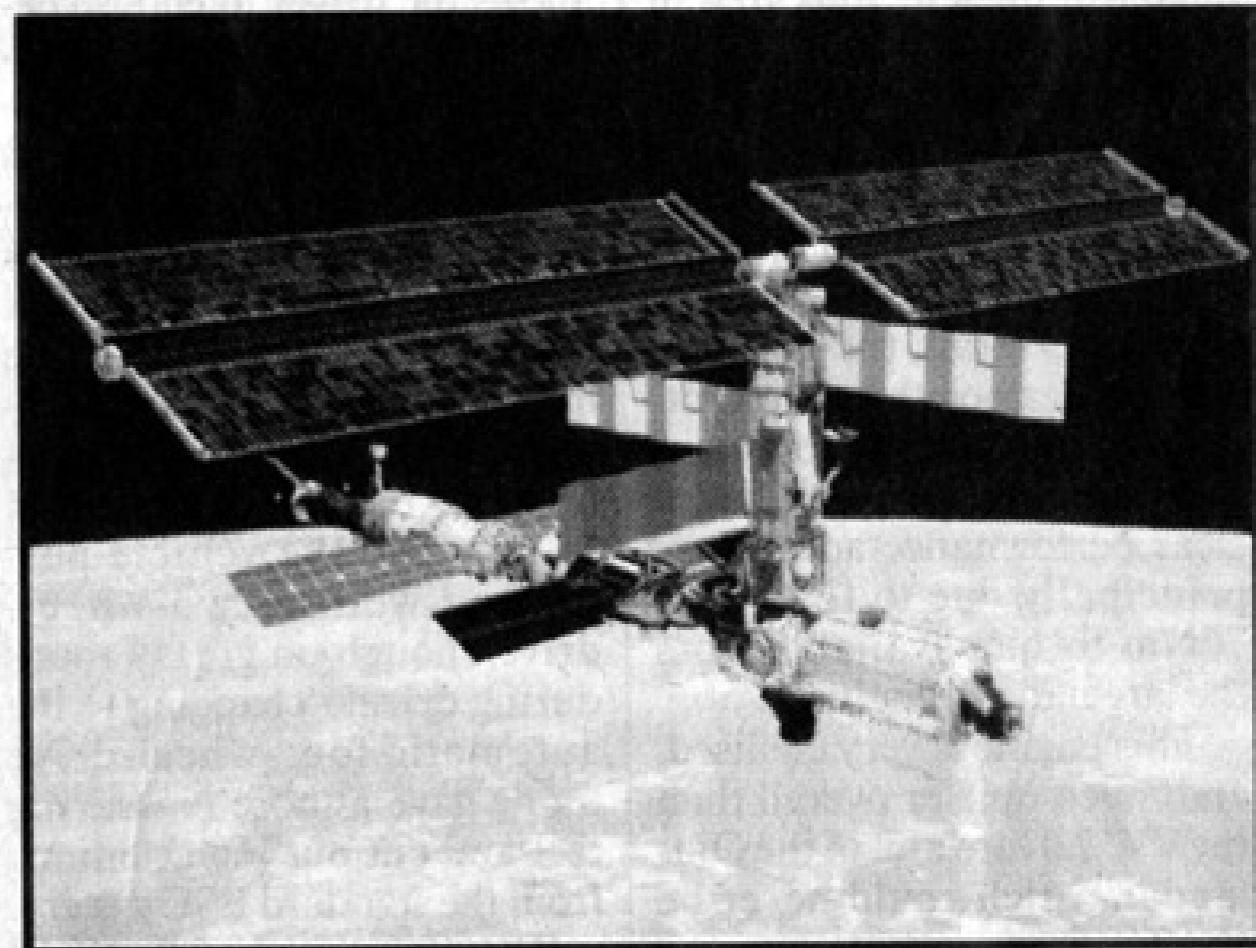
Gleeson said that there were a couple of dozen Irish firms working in the space industry.

Successful companies include Parthus, which designed a chip to implement Bluetooth for the international space station.

The technology is now used in a third of the world's Bluetooth applications.

Other successful, space-related companies mentioned by Gleeson include Dublin-based Acra Control and Galway based firms Eire Composites and O'hEocha Design.

Gleeson will be speaking at an Enterprise Ireland conference, called Innovating the Business Model, this Wednesday in Dublin's Stillorgan Park Hotel.



International space station: Parthus' Bluetooth chip