

Dr Rosemary Coogan is an astronaut.  
I am just going to say that again...  
Dr Rosemary Coogan is an astronaut.

What makes an astronaut? Rose is always keen to point out that she is not superhuman, but an ordinary person. Maybe that's true, but she has done and is doing extraordinary things. Rose was born in Northern Ireland but moved to England at a young age. At school, she was good at many subjects and nearly did Latin instead of Physics for her A Levels, but her Mum persuaded her that Physics might be a good idea (I think the world of space exploration owes Rosemary's Mum a lot...).

Rose considered doing medicine at university, then maybe a general science degree, but eventually she settled on physics and astronomy, which she studied here at Durham. During her degree, like many a student, she wasn't sure what to do for a career. Then she did a final year research project in astrophysics with Ian Smail and Mark Swinbank. That was it – her imagination was fired and she knew astrophysical research was for her.

However, Rose was now in a quandary – she was going to need to study for a PhD, and she hadn't applied to anywhere to do one. She also realised she would need to increase her research experience and so she decided to do a research master's degree.

While contemplating her next move, Rose worked in industry for a year as a simulation support engineer developing machine learning models to detect anomalies from robotic sensors - rather handy skills for a future astronaut.

Then she came back to Durham to do that Master's degree, which she did with me and my colleague Anthony Brown. At first, I think she imagined that Anthony and I knew everything, but we soon corrected that impression! She led the writing of a very nice paper called (wait for it) "Localizing the gamma-ray emission region during the 2014 June outburst of 3C 454.3."

Rose was then accepted to do a PhD at Sussex University on galaxy evolution. Next, it was time to get a job as a research scientist. Her first post was at the Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics in Germany and then she worked at the French National Space Agency.

In 2022 she was selected as an ESA astronaut, graduating from her training in 2024. She's just waiting for a slot to go into space.

Now, Rose is a very modest person, as you may have gathered. She will tell you she got where she is with a combination of perseverance, patience, a bit of luck, family support, and being open to new things. Yet she manages to be both ordinary and extraordinary at the same time, someone whose down-to-earth nature will inspire another generation to be anything but down-to-earth. When the time comes, we will all wish her NASA's usual "God speed" and add "you take part of all of us in Durham with you."

Chancellor/Vice-Chancellor I present Dr Rosemary Coogan to receive the degree of Doctor of Science honoris causa.