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▲ ESA's new astronaut intake includes British citizens (left to right) Meganne Christian, John McFall and Rosemary Coogan

Three UK astronauts announced by ESA

The 17 candidates are the agency's first new astronaut class since Tim Peake's in 2008

The UK has three new potential astronauts – including the first-ever astronaut with a disability – after the European Space Agency announced its new class of 17 astronaut candidates on 23 November.

Six members of the class will now undergo 12 months of basic training. Two people from this group are from the UK: astronomer Rosemary Coogan and John McFall, a paralympic sprinter and orthopaedic surgeon. McFall is joining the class as part of the Parastronaut Feasibility Project and will work with both ESA and NASA to see if adjustments can safely be made to allow disabled astronauts to fly in space.

"When it was announced that they were looking for a candidate with a

physical disability, I thought it was such an inspiring and thrilling opportunity," McFall said at the announcement. "I felt compelled to help ESA answer this question – can we get someone with a physical disability to do meaningful work in space? I think I can bring lots to the feasibility study, but I think I can bring inspiration. Inspiration that science is for everyone, and inspiration that, potentially, space is for everyone."

After basic training, the candidates will begin preparing to work on board the International Space Station and will eventually be assigned a mission flight.

The remaining 11 astronauts are ESA's first-ever reserve astronauts, including Anglo-Australian-Italian Meganne Christian. Currently, the only flight

opportunities are to the ISS, but more could arise as projects such as the Lunar Gateway, Artemis and the Chinese Space Station (which ESA has run training exercises on) mature. The reserves will stay in their current careers but receive support so they can step in should a flight arise.

"This is an extraordinary time for human spaceflight and for Europe," says David Parker, ESA's director of human and robotic exploration. "After the successful launch of Artemis I with ESA's European Service Module powering Orion to the Moon, we are on the forefront of human space exploration. We are delighted to have this group of extremely talented people to continue European science and operations on the International Space Station and beyond." www.esa.int