# MS Teams:
managing who can do what

The Default Permissions in MS Teams

In every Team there are automatically 3 different types of members in the Team. These categories of membership are Owner, Member and Guest. Each has different permissions to do with the Team and different levels of access to the folders and files in the Team Channels.

The creator of the Team is automatically the initial *Owner*. Owners can do everything in terms of managing the team. Managing the Team is done from the dropdown list which appears when you click on … next to the team name.
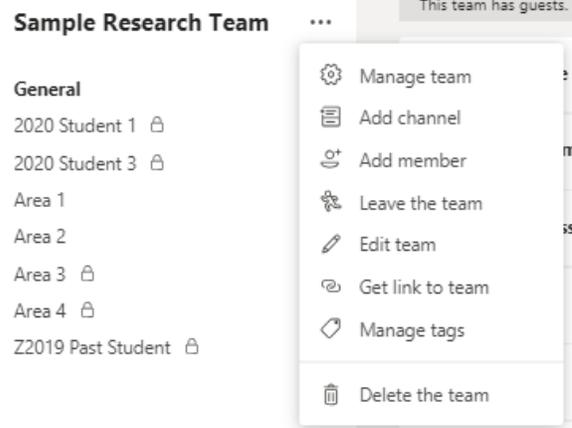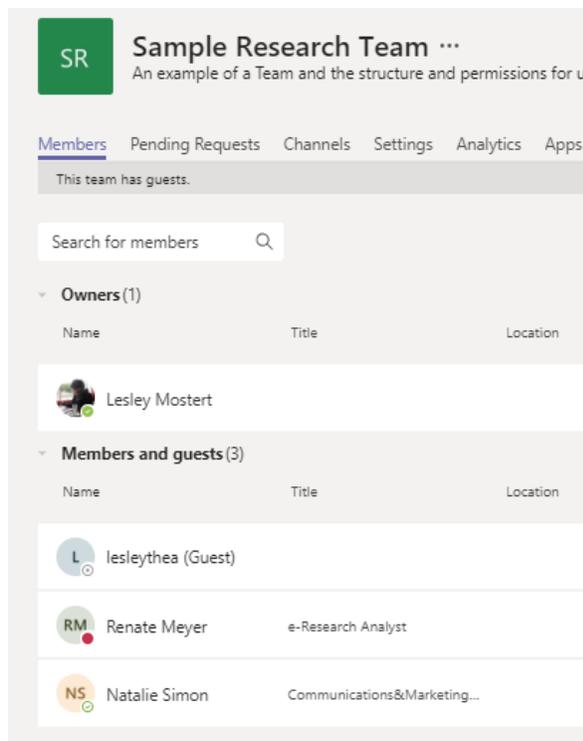
The Owner can then add members

 to the Team.

All members added who are from within UCT (@uct.ac.za email address) will automatically be added as *Members* of the Team.

All members added form external organisations or with personal email addresses will automatically be added as *Guests*.

These two categories of member automatically come with a different set of permissions. These can be found in the "Settings" tab under "Manage team".

Members automatically have permissions to do most of the functions in the team. The main exception is that they cannot add members. The most important automatic permission is creating and deleting channels. Others involve apps, tabs and connectors. In terms of the folders and files held in the Team, Members automatically have full editing rights on all of these, including deletion.

Guests automatically have almost no permissions for managing the Team, but they can participate in the posts. In terms of folders and files held in the Team, they have access to all folders and files but to view only.

These automatic permissions apply for all members in all categories in all "Standard Channels".

Changing Default Permissions in the Team

There is a certain amount of flexibility built into MS Teams for changing the permissions of members of the Team. Some of these are crucial for the longevity of the team, others may be helpful in terms of allowing a team with a large number of members to function effectively.

Adding Owners

The most important of these is that the creator of the Team, who is the initial Owner, can change a team member from Member to Owner. It is suggested that all research group Teams should have at least 3 Owners in order to mitigate against orphan teams with no owner in the event that an owner leaves UCT. Note that members external to UCT cannot become either Members or Owners.

This is done by opening the "Manage team" page. Then in the "Members" tab click on the down arrow next to the name of the person who is to be made an Owner.
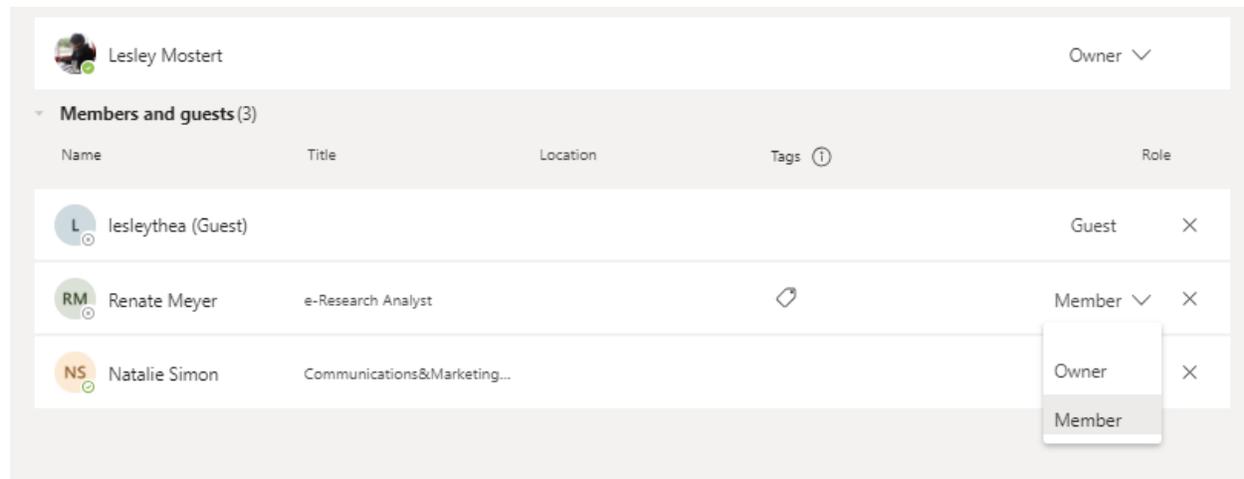
Limiting Member Permissions

The automatic permissions for Members are extensive, only excluding adding new members. In a large team these permissions can result in the team structure becoming very messy. In the "Manage team" page, select the "Settings" tab, and expand "Member permissions". Here you can remove some of the permissions; the ones you are most likely to want to remove are the top three which are channel permissions. This is particularly important if members include students, whose participation in the Team is most likely (perhaps hopefully) short in comparison with the lifespan of the Team. At the moment it is impossible to divide members into two categories with different permissions.

Increasing Guest Permissions

In contrast, the automatic permissions for guests are few. However, if desired, Guests can be given permissions related to channels. To do tis follow the same procedure as for Member permissions, instead expanding the "Guest permissions". Note that Guests cannot be given channel permissions which are not given to Members.

Creating Limited Access Channels

When creating channels, the default is the "Standard – Accessible to everyone on the team". This means exactly that – everyone can do whatever they like to the folders and files in the channel. But it is possible to create a channel with restricted access. This is called "Private – Only accessible to a specific group within the team".

Any member of the team can be added to the Channel, either when creating the channel or subsequently. But no one can be added as a member unless they are already a member of the Team.

Add members to the 2019 Student B channel
This is a private channel, so only the people you add here will see it.

Start typing a name   Add

                                        Skip

Members Settings

Search for members 🔍   👥 Add member

Owners (1)
Name   Title   Location   Role

    Lesley Mostert   Owner ⌄

Members and guests (0)

Sample Research Team ···

General
2019 Student B 🔒
2020 Student 1 🔒
2020 Student 3 🔒
Area 1
Area 2
Area 3 🔒
Area 4 🔒
Z2019 Past Student 🔒

The important thing to note here is that one cannot change the type of an existing channel. This means, that a Standard Channel will allow full access to all members of the Team, including members added after the creation of the channel. Conversely, a Private Channel which needs to be accessible to all members of the channel can simply have all the members added; however, every time a new member is added to the Team the will not have access to the channel in question until added there too. It is important with Private channels to ensure that each one has at least three Owners in the same way as the Channel does.

Limited access channels can be very helpful in teams where the UCT members cover a range such as students, administrators, technical staff, and research staff. This enables one, for example, to keep Research Projects and Student Projects separate.

Protecting Specific Channels, Folders or Files

There are many situations in which it is desirable for everyone to have access to a set of files, but where it is not desirable for those people to be able to change them.

Protecting Files

In all MS Office applications files can be protected to various degrees. This might be preventing any change for things such as data of finished experiments in spreadsheets, to documents such as standard operating practice for laboratories, to posters which have already been presented. It could include the need to keep track of versions which necessitates preventing people making changes by accident, or even saving the document unchanged as if it were a new version.

This is done by Going to the "File" tab on the extreme left of the tabs along the top of any Office item. Then select "Info" in the Left hand column. Selecting "Protect Document" results in a dropdown menu where the desired option can be selected and followed through. Note the inherent danger of locking with a password in terms of the possibility of access being lost forever.
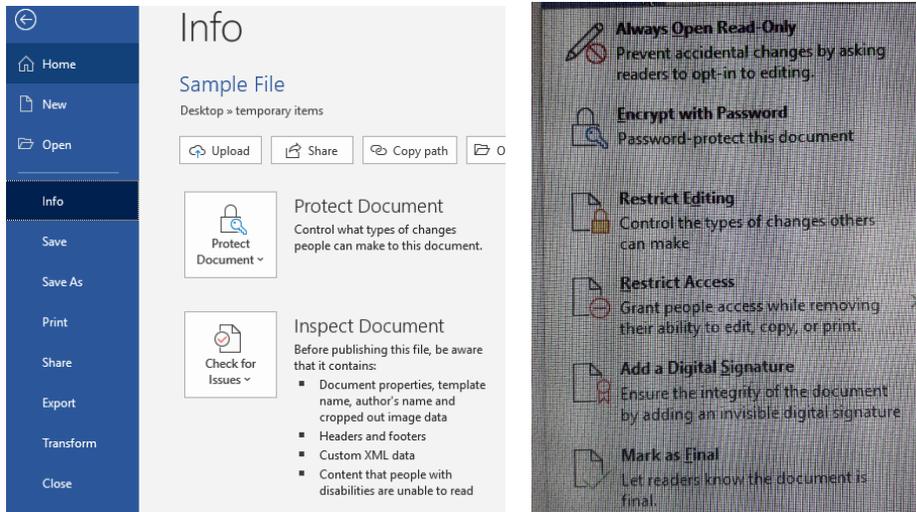
Protecting Folders or Channels

All the files in a folder or channel (or even a whole team) can be protected by going into SharePoint and changing the access permissions there. Whenever a File tab is open in a Teams Channel there is an option to "Open in SharePoint" on the ribbon.
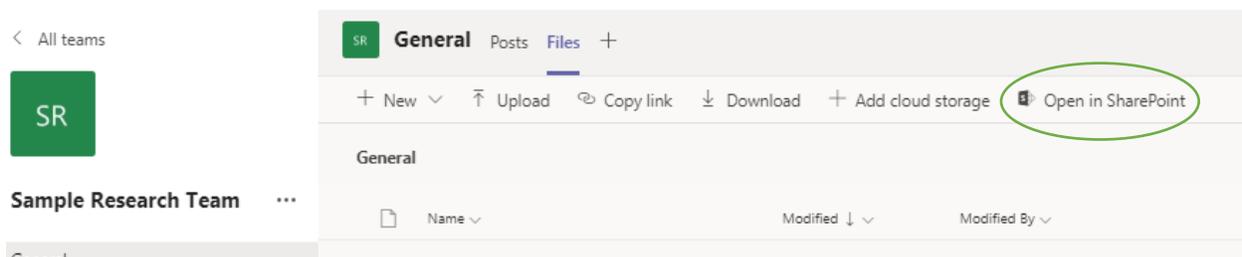
This opens the backend SharePoint folder containing the folders and files for that Channel. The information icon near the extreme right of the ribbon can be toggled to open the properties of the folder in question.
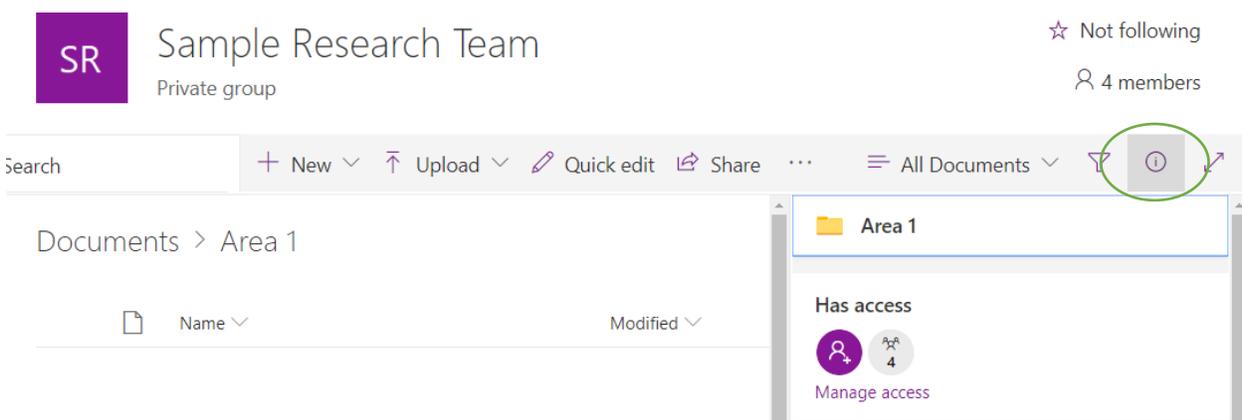
The "Manage access" pane shows all those who have access and what rights they have. Here all the Team Members are treated as a group and likewise the Team Guests (here called Visitors for unknown reasons). The access rights can be changed using the dropdown accessed through the arrow on the right.
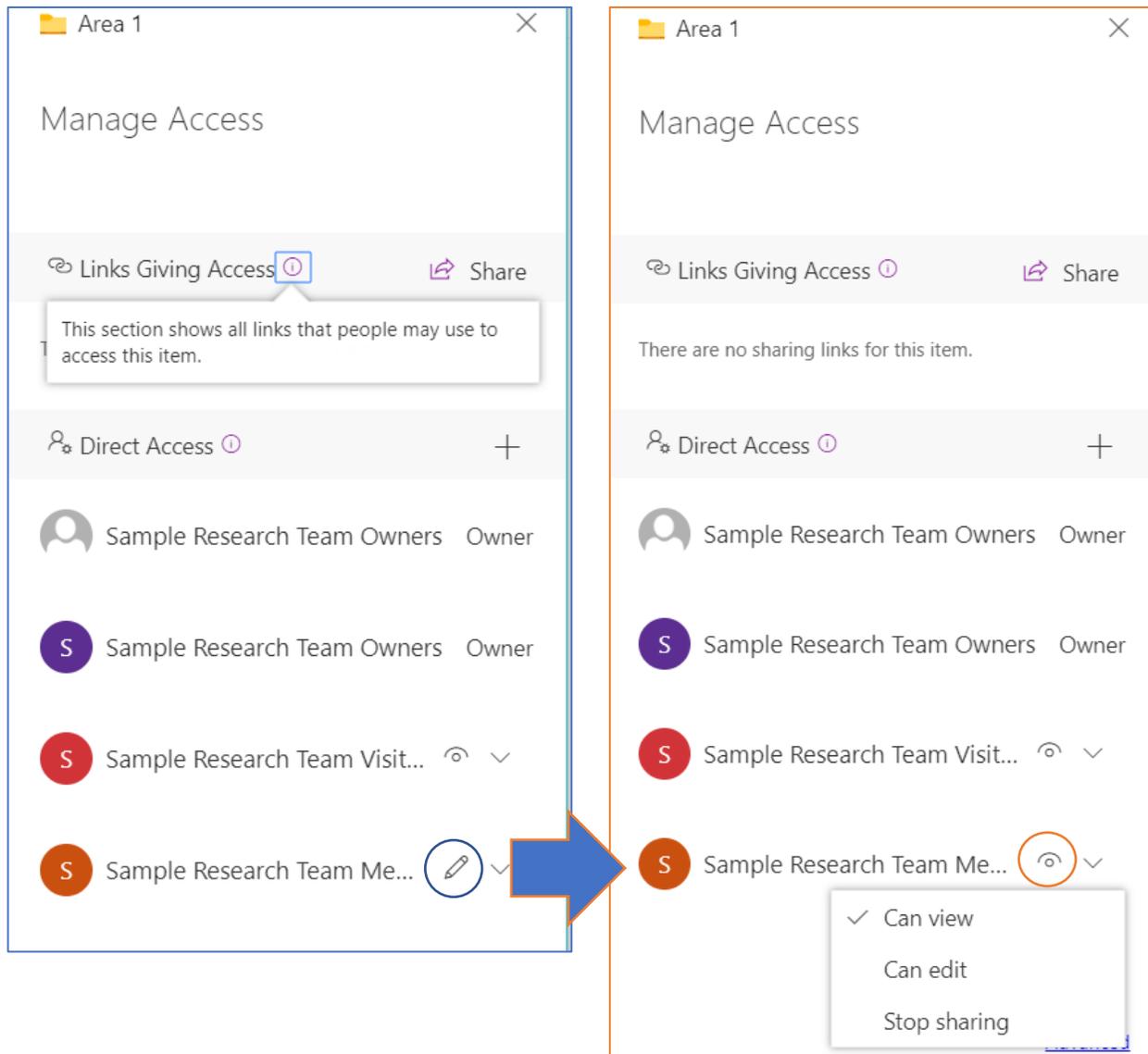
This process can be done at a Team, Channel, or folder level. Members can be restricted to viewing rights, inversely Guests can have their rights extending to editing.

Note that here it is possible to give an individual access to a file or folder even though they do not belong to the Team. This is discouraged, except for very specific situations, because it rapidly becomes impossible to remember who has access to what!

Managing Permissions, Access and Rights

This is a difficult thing to manage really well, and careful thought should be given to what the different categories of participants need to be able to do. It can be helpful to have group-level discussions around this. It can also help to have at least one person who is an Owner in every Team in a large research group. This person is able to help standardise the approach, while there is also the flexibility of each Team being able to be constituted fit-for-purpose.