Nottingham Trent
University

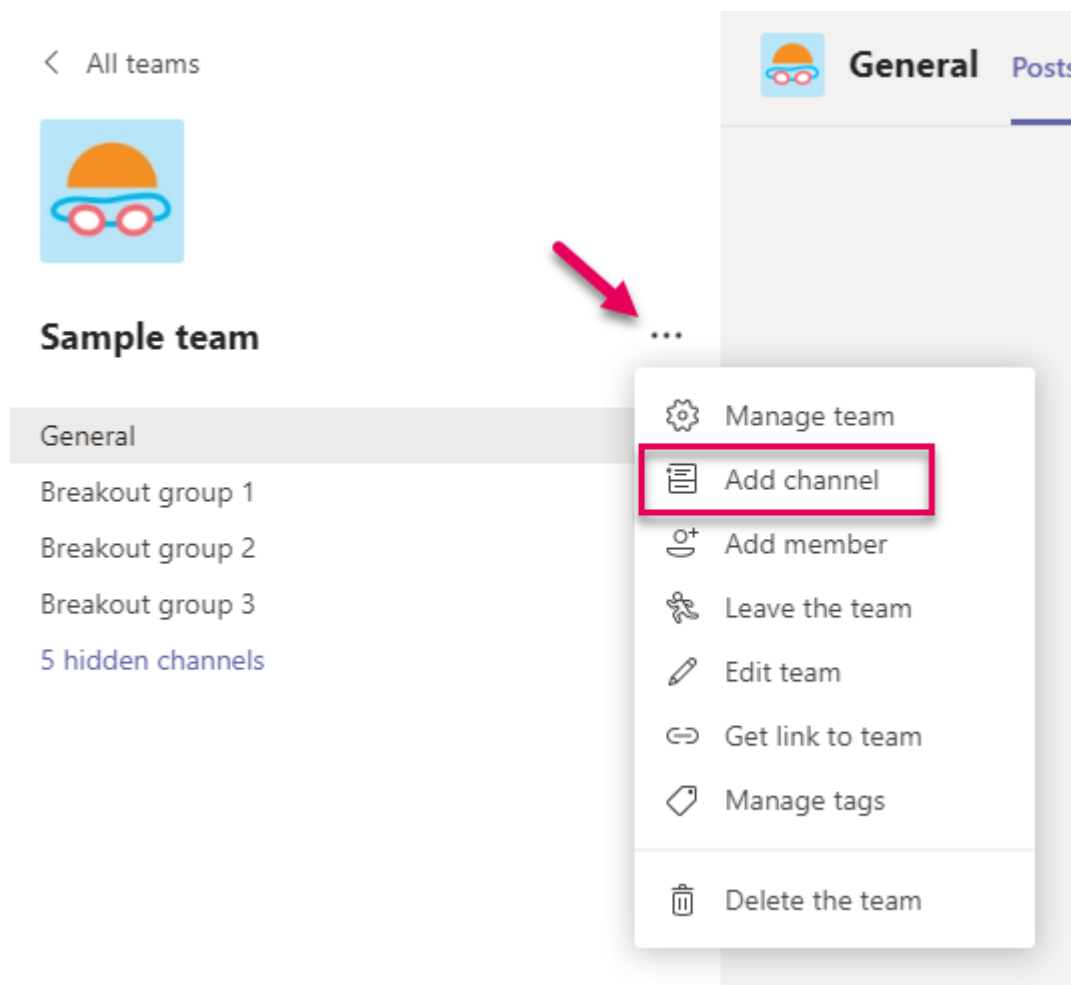# Small group work using Teams channels

There are two ways to use MS Teams to facilitate students working in small groups, using breakout rooms or using channels. This guide supports you to deliver small group sessions using channels. There is separate guidance on using breakout rooms.

Before the session

Prior to the session you should undertake the following steps to prepare.

Step 1: create channels

By default, there will be a single General channel in your module Team. You need set up several channels for group work. To do this, go to your Team, and click the **three dots** next to the team name, then click **Add Channel**.

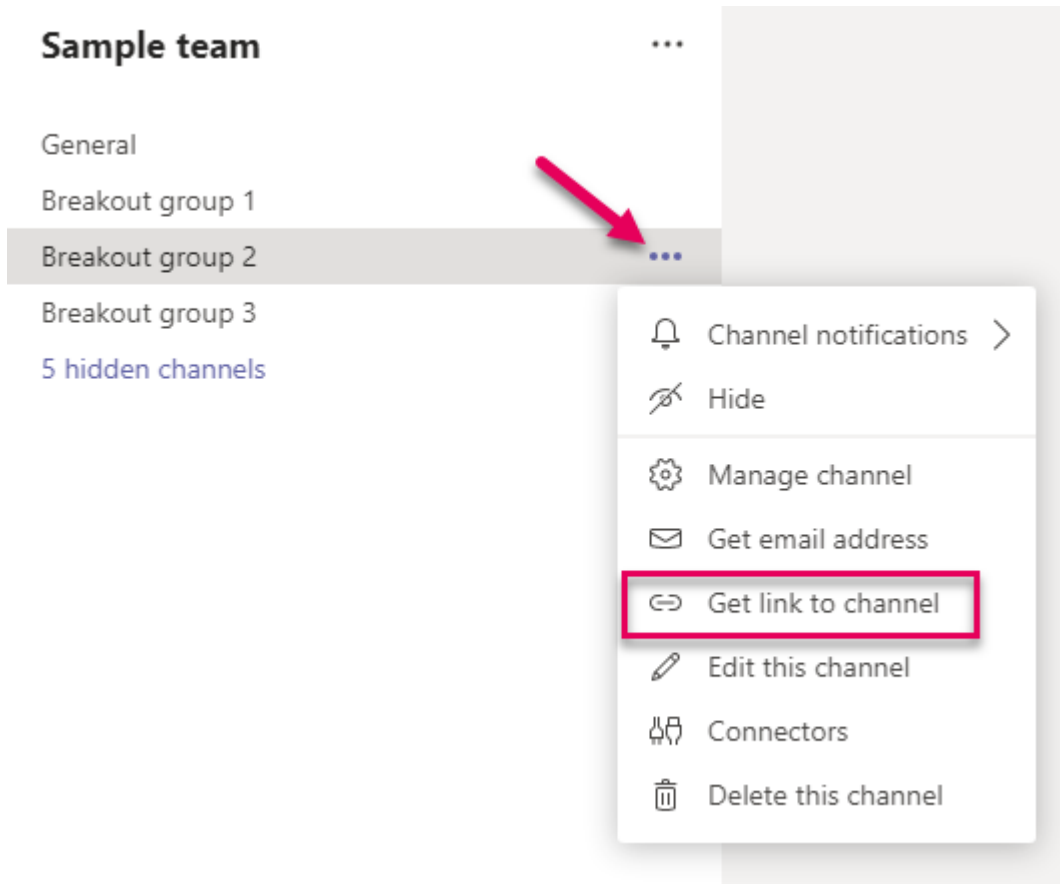In the pop-up box, give a clear, distinguishable name (1) for each (e.g. Group A, Group B) and add an optional description (2).

Ensure that when you create these channels, none are set to private (3). This means that you can make last-minute adjustments to grouping decisions and students can quickly move if necessary. If you automatically show the channel in everyone's list (4), be listed under the team name, but students can override and manage this themselves. Click **Add**.

The number of channels you create should match the number of groups you wish students to split in to. For example, if you have a class of 12, and you want to split them into four groups, create four channels.

Step 2: Decide on your approach to grouping

It may be wise to decide on groups before the session. You can display the group list at the start of the session when you have the attention of the whole group. Students will then know which channel to go to when you direct them to. You can also generate links to each channel to make things easier, by clicking on the **three dots** next to the channel name, then clicking **Get link to channel**.

For each group you should clearly nominate a leader. This will be important later. The alternative is to decide on groups in a session; with very small groups this might be possible, but may lead to confusion. For SCALE-UP sessions, it is best to share all roles beforehand.
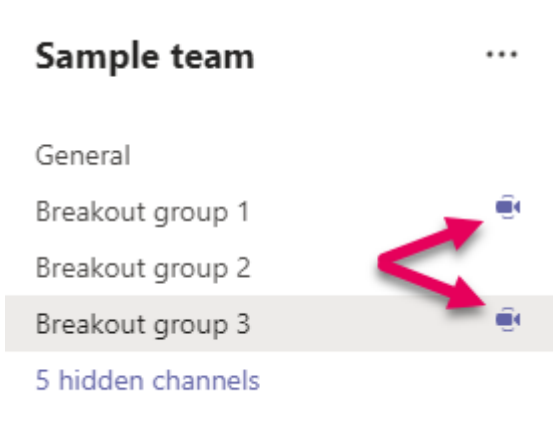
During the session

Start your Teams session: students will join as a group. Run your activities as a whole group, until you are ready to break out into smaller groups.

When you are ready to split into small groups: you must prepare students with the following before splitting the group:
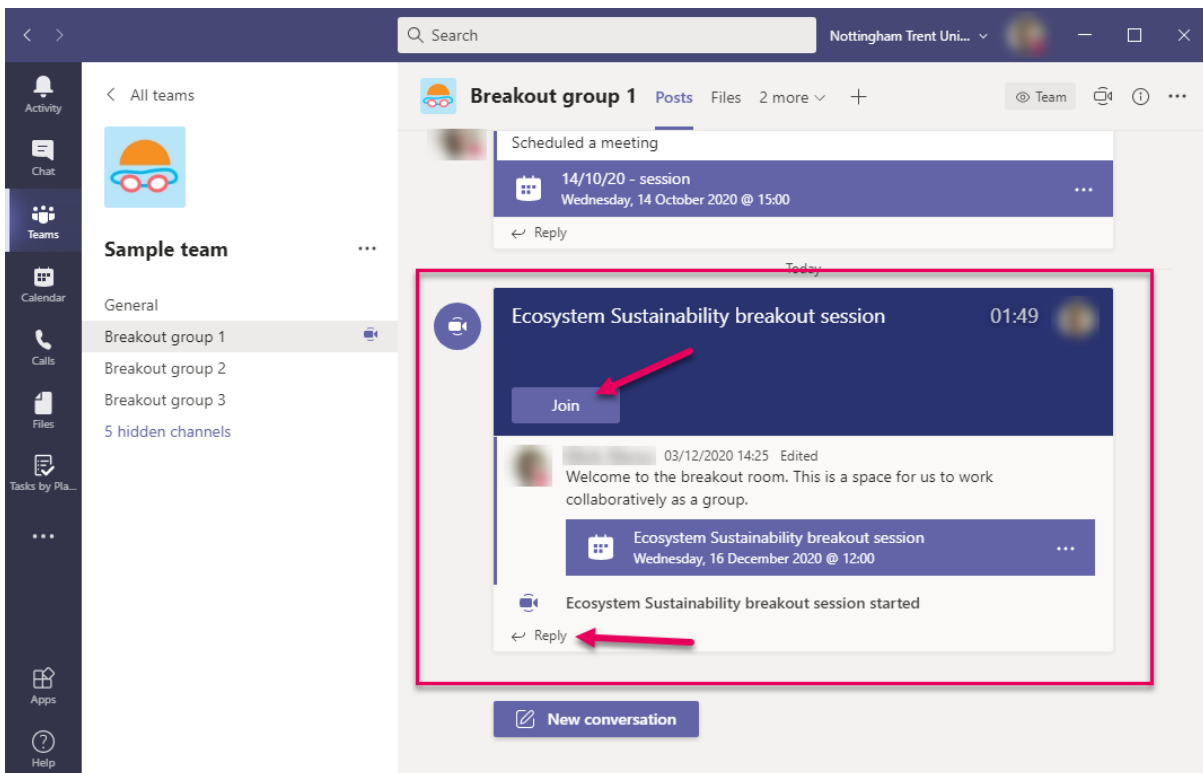
a. *Group organisation and leadership*: show the list of groups and point out that the leader needs to take note of their additional responsibility. They are responsible for starting the meeting in their channel. If you notice that a leader is absent, nominate someone else from the group. This is why it is better to plan in advance, rather than arrange on the spot; however, if you have a small group, you may be able to decide in the moment.

b. *Provide students with guidance on how to start a meeting*: students can either use the Meet Now function or create a calendar invitation for their group to meet. **If students get this bit wrong, they could struggle to start a meeting, and you may not be aware of it for some time**, so each group's leader must understand this. You may decide to share this before the session instead.

c. *Make it clear when and how to return to the whole group* before students split into groups: give a timing (e.g. 10 minutes) or agree a time (e.g. 9:30 am). Repeat this several times, and post it in the chat so that it is clear for all. When returning, students navigate to their Teams calendars and click **Join** on the main session meeting link.
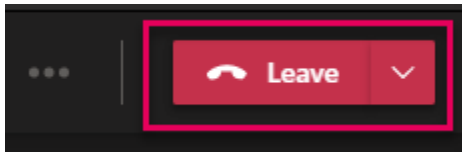
Facilitate the activity: when you are confident students are fully prepared, ask them to leave the group call and move to small groups. It may be wise to wait 5 minutes before working with any of the groups so that you are free for students who get stuck to call you. You can see what channels have meetings running by looking at the channel list for a video icon.
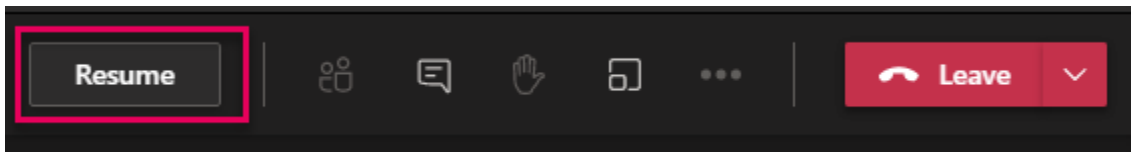

After this, you can then visit each breakout channel to facilitate learning further and click **Join** for the group videocall, or click **Reply** to join the text chat.

Continue to alternate for the remainder of the session: you can continue the session alternating between the whole group and smaller groups. Click **Leave** to exit the group meeting, and move to a different channel.

You may need to click **Resume** to be active when you return to the main session.

If there is more than one teacher, someone could stay in the main session to answer questions and provide support while others circulate the small groups to facilitate learning.

Important considerations

Students may struggle with this initially and require time for support. Try to account for this in your planning for the first few sessions. Once they grow used to the structure, they will need little input from you to make this work. Remind students that they can always return to the main session via their Teams calendar link.

Try to **record** the whole group delivery where possible, so that students who are not able to engage synchronously can catch up after. Remember to warn students you'll be recording the session and add a link to the recording in your learning room – see our guidance on Adding recorded Teams sessions to NOW.