

**For Immediate Release**

## **Microsoft GirlSpark expands to groom young female talent in Hong Kong to foster diversity and innovation**

*Networking with 21 top leaders and access to over 30 internship and job opportunities*

**Hong Kong, January 22, 2015** – Following the success of last year's inaugural Microsoft GirlSpark Camp, launched to inspire talented female students from different disciplines to join the ICT industry, Microsoft held a second GirlSpark Camp, in mid-January 2015. Leadership forums, training, mentorship, and hands-on project experience were held in partnership with The Women's Foundation, the leading NGO dedicated to the advancement of women and girls in Hong Kong, and the Ivey Business School, renowned for its extensive and expert use of case method teaching and learning, which immerses participants in problems and challenges faced by real companies. This year also saw new partnerships established with key Microsoft partners and the expansion of the program to include newly-introduced internship and job placement opportunities at Microsoft Hong Kong and other well-known IT/technology companies, matching the needs of the participants at various stages of career development.

"Microsoft GirlSpark is seeking to nurture a more diversified culture and environment that encourages talented females to pursue their passion in technology. Women have always been seen as strong in management, creativity, social abilities, and practicality, and all these skills are highly beneficial to the IT industry's overall competitiveness and continued innovation," said Horace Chow, General Manager of Microsoft Hong Kong. "The fact that one-third of last year's GirlSpark Camp participants have entered the technology sector or taken up a technical role after graduation is itself a testimony to the program's success. This has led us to expand the program, with an increased number of participants and new partnerships with industry peers, in order to offer highly sought-after internships and job placements to students of this year's camp."

The Microsoft GirlSpark extends beyond the three-day camp, with ongoing development support for participants. Approximately 30 internship and development opportunities with program partners and Microsoft Hong Kong will be offered to this year's participants. These opportunities range from one or two month internship positions to two-year job placements with job rotation and mentorship support. The first batch of program partners includes Accenture, a leader in management consulting, technology and outsourcing services, and Jardine OneSolution (JOS), a leading integrated IT service and solution provider in the region. Other development opportunities include sponsorship to attend major industry events and entrepreneurship programs, such as Microsoft Tech Days and CoCoon entrepreneurial programs. A job matching event will be held in March for employers and applicants to connect and explore.

Gender diversity has been a key issue in many fields in recent years, and one area that is more affected the most is the ICT industry. A recent Economist Intelligence Unit report titled "*Work to do: Women in male-dominated industries in Hong Kong*", which was commissioned by The Women's Foundation, found

that in 2012, females comprised just 29% of students enrolled in technology courses at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, there were zero female enrolments in two undergraduate computer science programs. Furthermore, a survey of 57 companies in Hong Kong showed that 88% of IT directors are male, with women representing less than 10% of IT staff at more than half the companies.

"In Hong Kong, despite women outnumbering men in tertiary institutions, men still dominate STEM subjects, and later on, careers in the ICT industry. The reasons for this are numerous, from parents discouraging their daughters to pursue science and maths at an early age, to pervasive but under-recognized biases in the learning environment and lack of exposure to leading female role models. This is why we are delighted to once again be partnering with Microsoft on GirlSpark, which exposes young women to the breadth and diversity of opportunities available in the tech industry, and will hopefully inspire more young women in Hong Kong to consider a career in ICT," said Su-Mei Thompson, Chief Executive Officer of The Women's Foundation.

"We are very pleased to work with Microsoft Hong Kong and The Women's Foundation on this meaningful program, particularly in developing a real-life technology-based business case for group projects. As an educational institute, we encourage students to discover and develop their interests, regardless of any pre-conceived ideas about gender roles in society. Diversity is incredibly important: males and females can perform equally well in any sector as long as they are inspired and have access to lifelong learning," said Professor Chris WH Chan, Professor and Associate Dean, Ivey Business School.

GirlSpark is part of Microsoft's flagship community drive *SparkHK*, and its underlying *YouthSpark* program. This year's GirlSpark Camp was attended by 60 female students, among which close to 80% are final-year or penultimate-year students from eight different universities, where they are pursuing a range of disciplines ranging from computer engineering and information systems to business and arts. The participants spent more than 600 project hours to derive eight business plans, worked with six mentors, and gained fruitful insights as well as a lifelong network of 21 successful leaders ranging from government officials, legislative councilors, and representatives from universities and business schools, to successful entrepreneurs and senior executives from large corporations and NGOs, as well as ICT industry experts and thought leaders.

Flora Sun, an Industrial Engineering graduate from The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, who took part in the first GirlSpark program said, "I joined the GirlSpark program because I was keen to learn more about working for Microsoft and interested to hear how they, along with The Women's Foundation, are helping women to enhance their careers. The real-life project and sharing sessions helped show me that there are a lot of roles available for women, even those with no IT background, leading me to begin my own career in the IT department of a leading international investment bank."

Shirley Wong, a student from The Chinese University of Hong Kong and a participant in this year's program, said, "As a third-year student, I am currently exploring career options and have become very interested in the IT industry. The mentor sharing sessions and the talks by industry experts were immensely insightful and taught me that a computing background is not always essential for a career in

this field. I enjoyed hearing from female leaders about their diverse experiences in the IT industry and am now seriously considering working for a major IT company such as Microsoft in the future.”

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### **About SparkHK and YouthSpark**

SparkHK is Microsoft’s multi-year initiative to empower Hong Kong’s growth and competitiveness through innovation. We are committed to changing lives and empowering people on all fronts through technology. Under SparkHK, our partnerships and efforts span three key areas: 1) Innovating for Growth, 2) Empowering Youth, and 3) Building a Next-Gen City.

YouthSpark is a global Microsoft initiative that focuses on empowering youth through technology training, internship and placement. In Hong Kong, we have committed to donate HK\$3 million in cash to two NGO partners to train 4000 young people.

### **About Microsoft**

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq “MSFT”) is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realize their full potential.

### **About The Women’s Foundation**

The Women's Foundation is a non-profit organisation dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls in Hong Kong through ground-breaking research, impactful and innovative community programmes, and education and advocacy. In addition to its partnership with Microsoft for GirlSpark, the Foundation provides scholarships and hosts speaker and panel events to encourage women and girls to pursue studies and careers in the STEM subjects. For more information, go to [www.thewomensfoundationhk.org](http://www.thewomensfoundationhk.org).

### **About Ivey Business School**

Ivey Business School - Asia ([www.ivey.com.hk](http://www.ivey.com.hk)) at Western University, the first North American business school to establish an Asian campus in Hong Kong in 1998, is Canada’s leading provider of relevant, innovative and comprehensive business education. Ivey Asia offers a top-ranked Executive MBA program, as well as a diverse range of Executive Education programs to over 1,000 executives annually. Renowned for its case method teaching, Ivey Asia is recognized as one of just four exclusive Case Study Method schools globally and is the world’s foremost producer of Asian case studies and largest producer of business cases after Harvard Business School. The Case Study Method draws on extensive research and business experience, where Ivey Asia faculty provide an engaging and intensive educational experience, equipping graduates with the skills and capabilities needed to tackle leadership challenges in today’s



complex business world. Ivey also offers world-renowned undergraduate, Masters in Science, and doctoral degree programs at its Campus in London, Ontario, Canada.

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