**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**AVANADE’S ‘15 for 15’ SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMME: CREATING A NEW FUTURE OF POSSIBILITY FOR FIVE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA STUDENTS**

*Avanade’s recent announcement of its local ‘15 for 15’ scholarship beneficiaries will see the company partner with the University of Pretoria to support these five female students in their tertiary studies. Geared to specifically promote uptake of STEM-related degrees, the programme is being rolled out across the globe to tackle some of the challenges women face in qualifying for and completing their studies.*

Tertiary education access continues to be a challenge for our country, so [Avanade](https://www.avanade.com/en)’s ‘15 for 15’ programme is set to make a significant impact on the lives of five University of Pretoria (UP) students: Oratile Mokoto, Lerato Tlokane, Sharné Annette Werner, Nicolle Bernelee Abrahams and Nikita Christina Dos Santos de Franca. A worldwide scholarship programme, ‘15 for 15’, is aimed at keeping female students enrolled in technology studies with strong Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programmes.

‘15 for 15’ is the flagship initiative in Avanade’s new corporate citizenship programme, which aims to close gender, technology and income gaps for women. Speaking at Friday’s scholarship announcement event at University of Pretoria, John Tadman, country manager at Avanade South Africa, reiterated the company’s commitment to contributing to the communities in which it operates. “Avanade’s vision is to be the leading digital innovator, so we are proud to be able to help enhance lives by providing skills and technology to women to drive innovation with passion and purpose.’’

The ‘15 for 15’ initiative is expected to benefit at least 45 students globally over the next five years, with the first 15 beneficiaries collectively selected from UP, UCL in London, and Cal Poly Pomona in the US. The initial scholarship beneficiaries have been chosen based on several criteria, with a heavy emphasis on assisting female applicants to complete their university education.

"We are very honoured to be the first African university chosen to partner with Avanade’s ‘15 for 15’ scholarship programme,” said Professor Cheryl de la Rey, vice-chancellor at the University of Pretoria. “The University of Pretoria actively promotes STEM-related programmes among female students. As such, we are extremely encouraged by the high level of involvement that Avanade will be investing in our students in terms of the internship and mentoring aspects of the programme. We wish each of these students well in their studies and are committed to supporting them as much as we can.”

While the uptake and completion of STEM-related qualifications is an imperative for driving the country’s future growth and development, research by [Higher Education SA (HESA)](http://www.moneyweb.co.za/archive/south-africas-high-university-dropout-rates/) 1, a Section 21 company representing all 23 public universities and technikons in South Africa, shows STEM-related drop-out rates have escalated significantly in recent years. “At certain institutions, STEM drop-out rates are currently as high as 35%, with the bulk of those deregistering doing so in their first year of study,” notes Tadman. “One of the main reasons cited for dropouts in South Africa are financial constraints – where students enrol for courses, but don’t have enough funding to see them through – but a lack of academic preparedness and students not receiving appropriate support from universities and/or their families are also factors. Female students are often more acutely affected by these factors.”

Avanade’s partnership with the University of Pretoria has been structured to overcome barriers to South African females completing their university education. “As partners on this project, Avanade will be working with UP to provide our five South African scholarship beneficiaries with financial support and mentoring, as well as giving them access to the university’s alumni network. We will additionally be offering them internships and the opportunity to gain work experience at the company, equipping them for fulfilling future careers,” concludes Tadman.

According to research cited in ENCA and Moneyweb, “South Africa’s high university dropout rates” (16 March 2008 and 19 May 2015), available at <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/student-dropout-rate-high> and <http://www.moneyweb.co.za/archive/south-africas-high-university-dropout-rates/>

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**About Avanade**

Avanade leads in providing innovative digital services, business solutions and design-led experiences for its clients, delivered through the power of people and the Microsoft ecosystem. Our professionals combine technology, business and industry expertise to build and deploy solutions to realize results for clients and their customers. Avanade has 28,000 digitally connected people across 23 countries, bringing clients the best thinking through a collaborative culture that honors diversity and reflects the communities in which we operate. Majority owned by Accenture, Avanade was founded in 2000 by Accenture LLP and Microsoft Corporation. Learn more at [www.avanade.com](http://www.avanade.com).