At the Annual General Meeting of the Modern Language Teachers' Association of Qld Inc. on 24 February 2007, Life Membership was conferred on Dr Leigh Kirwan of Griffith University. This Life membership was proposed by several members of the Gold Coast Branch. Below is the citation read out at the meeting.

Dr Leigh John KIRWAN completed his BA studying French, German, Japanese and linguistics at the University of Queensland in 1976. He then studied for a Diploma of Education with the teaching areas of French and Japanese at the same university in the following year. He introduced Japanese to Palm Beach – Currumbin High School – only the second school on the Gold Coast to teach Japanese - in 1978. Having been promoted to Subject Master Foreign Languages in 1981 he continued to teach French and Japanese there until 1988. Under Leigh’s management, Palm Beach – Currumbin at one time had the largest number of Japanese students of any school in the southern hemisphere.

Leigh became a Japanese Language Consultant in 1988, advising and teaching Japanese language and culture to a number of companies including Australian Airlines, Jupiter’s Casino, Myer Pacific Fair and Ramada Hotel Surfers Paradise. He founded the Gold Coast Language Centre in 1989 which employed a number of staff and offered classes in nine languages and provided a translation and interpreting service.
In 1990, Leigh taught Japanese Teaching Methodology as a part-time lecturer at the Gold Coast campus of Griffith University, and became a full-time lecturer in Japanese the following year. He also lectured in Japanese Teaching Methodology at GU’s Mt Gravatt campus.

After giving a paper on his research area of the presentation of Japanese script for L2 learners of Japanese at the World Congress of Applied Linguistics in Tokyo in 1999, he was invited to become the Japanese Project officer for NALSAS during 2000 and 2001. This included visiting schools teaching Chinese, Korean and Japanese in South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland and assisting to complete a guide on world’s best practice in the teaching of script based languages. Leigh was awarded a PhD in Japanese Language Teaching in 2003 for his thesis “The Role of Furigana in Japanese Script for Second Language Learners of Japanese”.

He was invited to be the Tertiary Representative on the State Review Panel for Japanese.

He was a founding member of the Gold Coast Language Teachers’ Association in 1979. This group became the Gold Coast Branch of the MLTAQ in about 1982. Leigh has held executive positions including President a number of times over the years. Additionally, he

- was active in the Japanese sub-committee in Brisbane under Roger White for many years when a high school teacher of Japanese
- offered fast-track Japanese language teaching courses for the MLTAQ through the Gold Coast Language Centre in 1989 and 1990
- convened the first combined Gold Coast Languages Speech Contest at Griffith University in 1991 and has continued to convene almost every year since
- organised a number of “Year 10 Japanese Experience Days” for the students of MLTAQ members on the Gold Coast
- has been an active organisor of the Speech Contest on the Gold Coast for 25 years including MC for the Japanese Contest at Miami High a number of times
• Has been instrumental in securing the long term future for "Celebrating Languages" by working on proposals, discussions and finally the acceptance by Griffith University to make this an annual joint event with the MLTAQ.
• Has attended and presented papers at many MLTAQ and AFMLTA conferences.
• Has published papers in MLT AQuarterly and BABEL, including "Harnessing Furigana to Improve your Japanese Students' Kanji Reading Ability" in 2005.

Photo: Carmel Gomm, Leigh Kirwan, Sherryl Saunders, Ros Fischer