Summary of advocacy SIG

Purpose
In response to information collected from the 2018 AFMLTA member survey and in discussion at AFMLTA National Assembly, the Executive determined to set up a Special Interest Group (SIG). It was noted that a SIG focusing on advocacy should be formed as an action item out of Assembly

Respondents to the 2018 AFMLTA member survey indicated a request for support in terms of advocacy. The purposes of the SIG were to find out more about what this need is and how it could be supported by the AFMLTA.

Establishment
- The SIG was advertised on Facebook, NIB, Twitter, through the AFMLTA News In Brief (NIB) and through MLTA liaisons and interested people registered by emailing the Vice-President, with the resulting SIG being formed from those expressions of interest.
- *Google groups* was used as an online discussion forum with a focus question posed each week, for a period of 6 weeks. Discussion commenced on 1/8/18 and concluded on 31/10/18.

Outcomes
Through a process of question-posing and discussion, a distillation of members perspectives is outlined below.

What it means to advocate
Advocacy starts at the grass roots level. Those who are involved in the work itself are the best advocates - by being the best role models they can be and by aiming to influence positively. Language teacher enthusiasm and commitment is important to help promote student learning. Involvement of teachers, as individuals, in the professional associations and participation in regular professional learning activities are essential.

In schools, teachers can facilitate a number of activities outside of the classroom to promote language and culture. Using past students as role models is a very effective strategy. Professional associations advocate by bringing people together at a higher level. There is power in numbers and the lobbying and representation work of the professional associations can be very powerful.
The rationale for advocacy

If advocacy is focussing on ways to improve learner retention, it needs to focus on the here-and-now in learners’ lives. To advocate with them we need to provide a language learning experience that engages, and that learners see as connected to their everyday selves, not just a benefit to their 'future selves'.

The rationale most often spoken of includes the benefits of bilingualism, engagement in two or more world languages, facility to be a citizen of the world, gaining intercultural understanding, the cognitive benefits, as well as interest, community language maintenance and other humanistic and academic reasons. These are all good reasons for a rationale, and work outwards, to politicians or administrators. The bigger picture arguments about the benefits of language learning and bilingualism are best targeted at these decision makers – where advocacy is focussed on quality of provision.

The role of individual teachers

‘Accomplished languages and cultures teachers are advocates for language learning, intercultural communication and intercultural sensitivity, linguistic and cultural diversity. They are advocates for languages both with and for students, schools and communities and engage with wider community to promote languages.’ (AFMLTA, 2005).

As part of our work as advocates, teachers are role models when being clear of their own rationale for learning languages and demonstrating why the learning of languages is important.

The role of languages teachers is to advocate for recognition of importance of languages and intercultural understanding within students’ lives. Learning from and supporting others within the wider community by creating networks (AFMLTA, state MLTAs, national, state, regional and community), promotes support and common interests, learning and sharing.