**EMBARGOED until: 00:01hrs**

2 November 2017

**Edinburgh schoolboy wins national Life After Stroke Award**

Neil Ferguson, 15, from Morningside, has been presented with a Life After Stroke Award by Paralympian Scott Quin and TV presenter Amanda Lamb at a glittering award ceremony in London on 1 November 2017.

On the morning of 23 December 2015, completely out of the blue, schoolboy Neil was taken to hospital after completely losing movement in his arm, leg and his ability to speak. His family were told that he had had a devastating stroke. Although no immediate cause was found, it was later traced back to a seemingly minor incident incurred while he was representing his school playing rugby three weeks previously, which had left him with a sore neck and bad headaches.

It took four months in hospital and intensive therapy for Neil to learn to sit up and eventually to walk again. Neil worked hard with physiotherapists to build up the muscles that showed signs of working, and has learned to use his left hand to write, type and dress. Sport had always been a big part of his life, so Neil learned to swim again using only one arm and a weak leg. He now swims regularly and has recently been selected to train with the Scottish disability swim squad. As he could not return to rugby or run Neil has also learnt to canoe and kayak one-handed, and ride a trike.

The stroke also left Neil with a condition called aphasia, which affects his ability to express himself through speaking or writing. He was unable to make any sound for five weeks, but showed incredible determination to improve. After 15 months, Neil could speak simple sentences. Neil has returned to school, and is working hard to help other children living with aphasia and stroke in Scotland.

Neil’s mother Lynne said: “Neil has faced each challenge life has thrown at him so positively, and he has never once complained about having had a stroke. He works so hard with his recovery, and tries his best to achieve everything he can. He keeps us all smiling and our hearts just burst with pride.”

Juliet Bouverie, Chief Executive of the Stroke Association, said: “Neil is a really remarkable young man. Around one in three stroke survivors has difficulty speaking or understanding, leaving them feeling lost for words. This can be terrifying and isolating. Neil is young, but he has risen to all the challenges he has faced with great maturity, grace and grit. He has shown extraordinary depth of character, resilience, and courage and we are honoured and delighted to give him this award.”

The Life After Stroke Awards celebrate the achievements of unsung heroes who are helping to conquer stroke. To find out more about the Life after Stroke Awards please visit [www.stroke.org.uk/lasa](http://www.stroke.org.uk/lasa)

**Ends**

For further information: please contact Angela MacLeod at the Stroke Association, on 0131 555 7244 or email [Angela.MacLeod@stroke.org.uk](mailto:Angela.MacLeod@stroke.org.uk)

**Notes to Editors**

**The Stroke Association**

* A stroke is a brain attack which happens when the blood supply to the brain is cut off, caused by a clot or bleeding in the brain. There are around 15,000 strokes in Scotland every year and it is the leading cause of severe adult disability. There are over 120,000 people in the Scotland living with the effects of stroke.
* The Stroke Association is a charity. We believe in life after stroke and together we can conquer stroke. We work directly with stroke survivors and their families and carers, with health and social care professionals and with scientists and researchers. We campaign to improve stroke care and support people to make the best recovery they can. We fund research to develop new treatments and ways of preventing stroke. The Stroke Helpline (0303 303 3100) provides information and support on stroke. More information can be found at [www.stroke.org.uk](http://www.stroke.org.uk)

**Lost for Words**

* After a stroke, around one in three survivors have difficulty speaking and/or understanding, which can be terrifying and isolating. But with the Stroke Association’s support, people can find new ways to communicate. Find out how you can help at [www.stroke.org.uk/lostforwords](http://www.stroke.org.uk/lostforwords) or search for #lostforwords

**Sponsors**

* The 2017 Life After Stroke Awards are sponsored by TONI&GUY Charitable Foundation. More information can be found at: [www.toniandguyfoundation.org.uk](http://www.toniandguyfoundation.org.uk)