



# A balancing act

From falling prices to the threat posed by persistent organic pollutants, political uncertainty and Brexit notwithstanding, 2019 has been a challenging year for the metals recycling industry.

**Throughout the year, the metals recycling industry saw prices for certain ferrous scrap grades tumble by anything up to 50 per cent, reflecting falls in demand and global steel commodity prices. At the same time, there was an increased focus on potential hazardous additives in different components of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) and end-of-life vehicles (ELV).**

In fact, research carried out by industry groups indicated that certain types of WEEE/WEEE-derived plastics contained very high levels of certain persistent organic pollutants (POPs), particularly flame-retardants.

Given these results, the Environment Agency (EA) hypothesised that, given many of the same plastics are used in vehicles, ELVs may be hazardous. It asked the BMRA to test durable plastics found in ELVs for the presence of POPs as well as antimony trioxide. Thankfully, testing showed that ELVs fell below the permissible threshold for these compounds.

Around the same time, the EA confirmed its intention to pull the Regulatory Position Statement for metal shredder residue (MSR), which designated MSR as non-hazardous, and invited the sector to run a new testing regime to prove again that MSR is not hazardous. The resulting MSR trial, which will take place

across multiple sites over six months, will look for a host of potential hazards such as zinc oxide. The methodology being used was developed during a pilot study, which indicated that MSR should be classified as non-hazardous. The full trial results are expected to be published in the third quarter of 2020.

Away from the doom, gloom and science, there have been some real positives. In February, BMRA was joined by its new Chief Executive, James Kelly. James came with extensive experience of running trade associations in complex business arenas.

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Then, in April, BMRA published sector guidance regarding acceptance criteria for UK bulk ferrous scrap grades to help ensure quality and safety throughout the supply chain. The guidance aims to address the potential for issues to arise around main fragmentiser feed, HMS 1 and 2, OA, Plate and Girder, 7B as well as the main WEEE grades arriving at

BMRA members' facilities.

With Government's sight firmly focused on delivering the Resources and Waste Strategy, there has been a renewed focus on embracing a circular economy model. This is good news as the metals sector is ideally placed to drive the adoption of a circular economy by providing examples of best practice when it comes to using secondary raw materials time and time again.

It is of little use enabling the sector to thrive if there is no way of maintaining – or indeed growing – the workforce, which is why interest in the Level 2, sector-specific, Metal Recycling General Operative (MRGO) apprenticeship has continued to grow. In fact, the Trailblazer group behind the development of the MRGO won the Excellence in Learning and Development award at the National Recycling Awards. The next step, the level 5 Metal Recycling Technical Manager apprenticeship, is now in the final stages of development and the Group hopes to run the first pilot early in 2020.

BMRA, the Trailblazer group and the wider sector believes by offering apprenticeships, we can show a real career path for people in this industry whilst ensuring that knowledge is passed down to the next generation of metal recyclers. With interest in joining the sector as a career growing, whatever challenges the sector faces, UK metal recyclers will remain open for business.