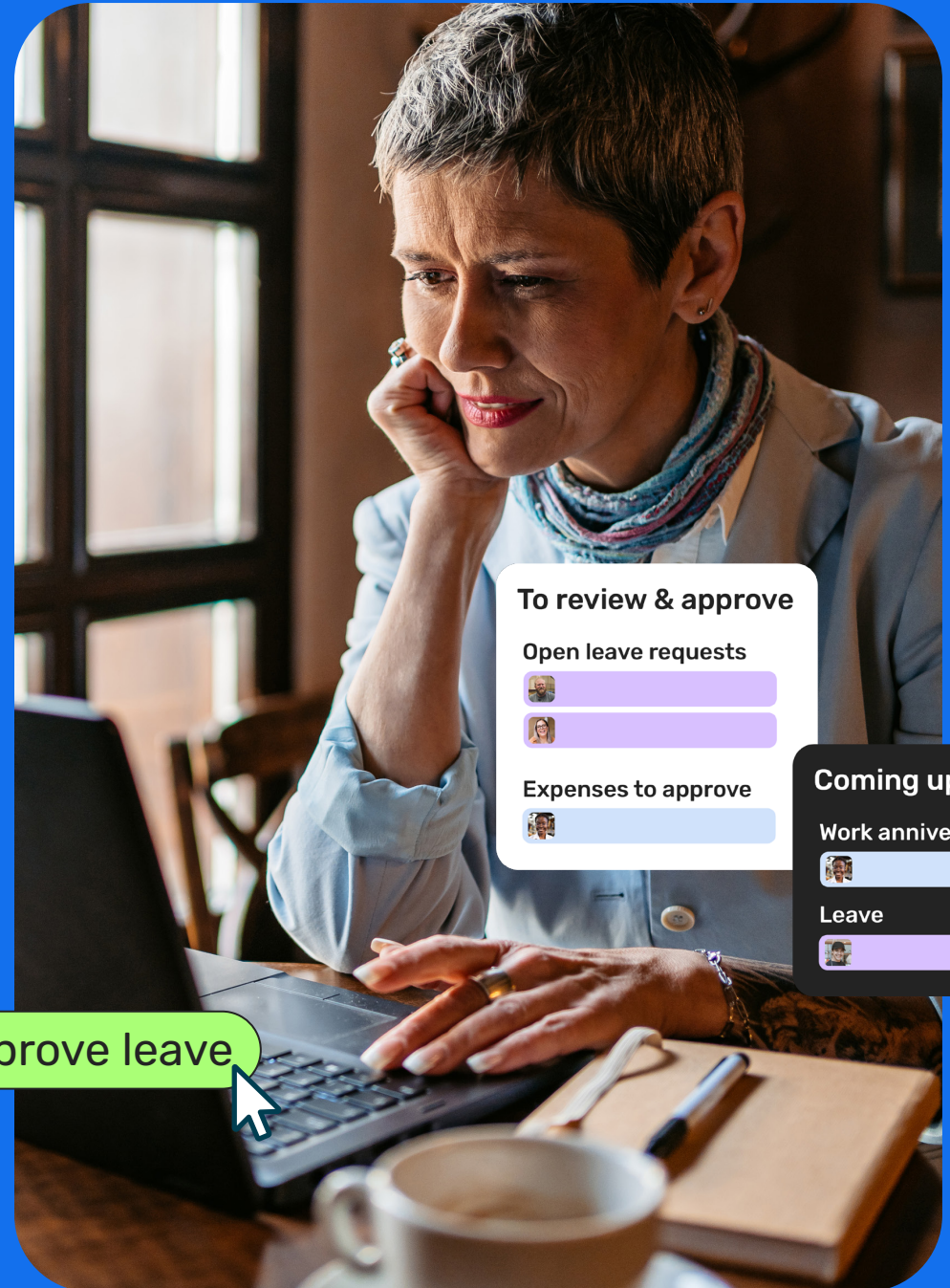


# A simple guide to **HR software** for SMEs

Cut through distractions  
and reclaim your focus



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## Hey there,

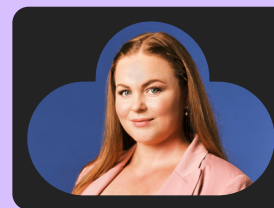
Choosing the right HR software for your business can feel like navigating a maze, right? Well, you're not alone. I'm Charlie O'Brien, Head of People at Breathe, and - working for an SME myself - I totally get it.

If you're a complete newbie, you may not even know where to start with HR software. That's why, here at Breathe, we've created this complete guide to show you the ropes and get you on the right track. Think of it as your HR software GPS - designed specifically for small businesses like yours. (You're welcome.)

We'll guide you through everything you need to know about HR software - from what it is and key features to consider, to its benefits, costs, and data security. There's even a handy checklist included to streamline your software research.

So, let's dive in and unravel the mysteries of HR software together. I promise we'll keep it real, relatable & useful.

Here's to making informed decisions and transforming your business for the better.



All the best,

**Charlie O'Brien**  
Head of People at Breathe



# What is **HR** software?





## Let's talk HR software

How do you currently manage your HR admin? Maybe you have a folder of various spreadsheets, or perhaps you make do with filing cabinets and a holiday wall chart?

While these methods often 'do the job', in reality they're detrimental to your productivity and overall efficiency. This is why so many UK small businesses have made the switch to HR software.

HR software equips SMEs with the tools needed to streamline their HR operations and cut through distractions. Allowing businesses and employees to thrive.

Rather than using spreadsheets to keep track of things like holiday & employee details, HR software centralises, automates and simplifies people-processes – **saving you bags of time and making life as a small business that bit easier.**

HR software is normally cloud-based, too – so you can access your data from anywhere with an internet connection. It's time to ditch spreadsheets and take time back for the valuable work you do.

**Read on to discover how HR software can transform your processes in a big way.**



**"Before Breathe, it was all filing cabinets full of paperwork. Just finding essential documents could be a real challenge. Now, with Breathe's HR software, the team has everything in one place, making it easier to keep operations running smoothly while reducing errors and saving time."**



Breathe customer – Mike Rich, CEO,  
Barnet Carers





## Did you know HR software will help you to...

### ✓ **Manage your workforce**

- Sickness & absence tracking
- Holiday management
- New hire onboarding & offboarding
- Expense management
- Recruitment & applicant tracking (ATS)
- Rostering & Timesheets

### ✓ **Stay legal and compliant**

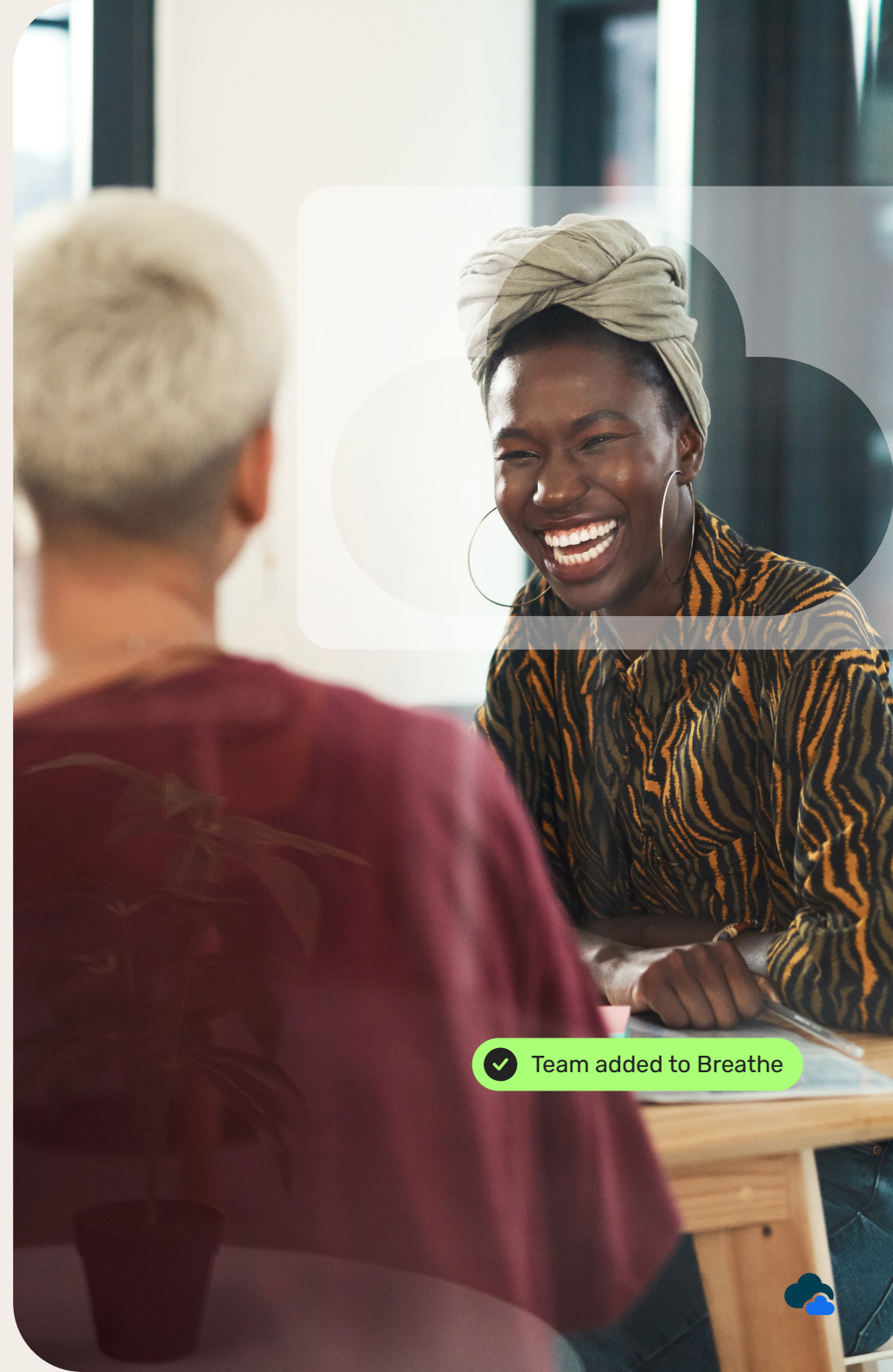
- Centralise employee information
- Document storage
- Reporting
- E-learning

### ✓ **Keep your employees energised**

- Feedback & suggestions
- Company announcements
- Employee recognition

### ✓ **Manage employee performance**

- Reviews and feedback
- Training



# 9 benefits of HR software over spreadsheets





## 1. Save valuable time on everyday admin

HR software is designed to simplify the management of HR processes and data.

It takes care of time-consuming day-to-day tasks including leave requests, updating employee information, expense management, HR reporting, organising employee documents – and so much more.

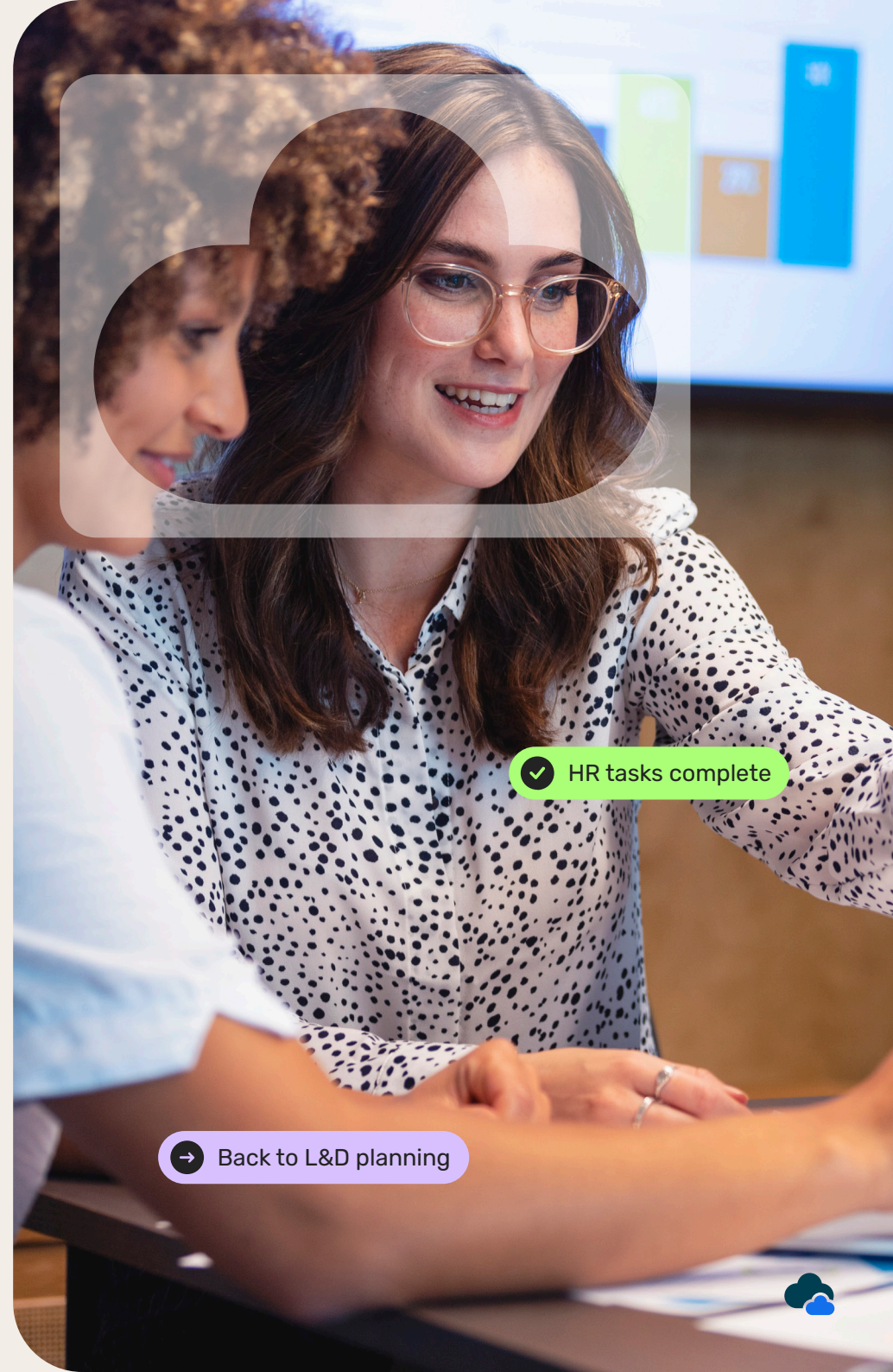
So, with more time on your side, you can focus on other important tasks & spend more time focusing on your people.

An average Breathe customer saves 4 hours each week. What would you do with half a working day back?

## 2. Improve efficiency

Switching to an HR software platform not only means you'll have better visibility of employee data, but your team will also have visibility of their remaining holiday allowances, personal details, sick days & more.

So, you'll save time on the never-ending admin and have more time for the bigger tasks. Result.



✓ HR tasks complete

→ Back to L&D planning





### 3. Keep your data secure

Keeping your data stored in the cloud rather than in filing cabinets & folders eliminates dangerous security risks and helps you stay GDPR compliant.

Plus, HR software that is ISO27001 accredited has achieved the world's best-known standard for data security. This means the organisation has put specific systems and procedures in place to protect the data they handle – including your employees' personal details, such as salaries and addresses.

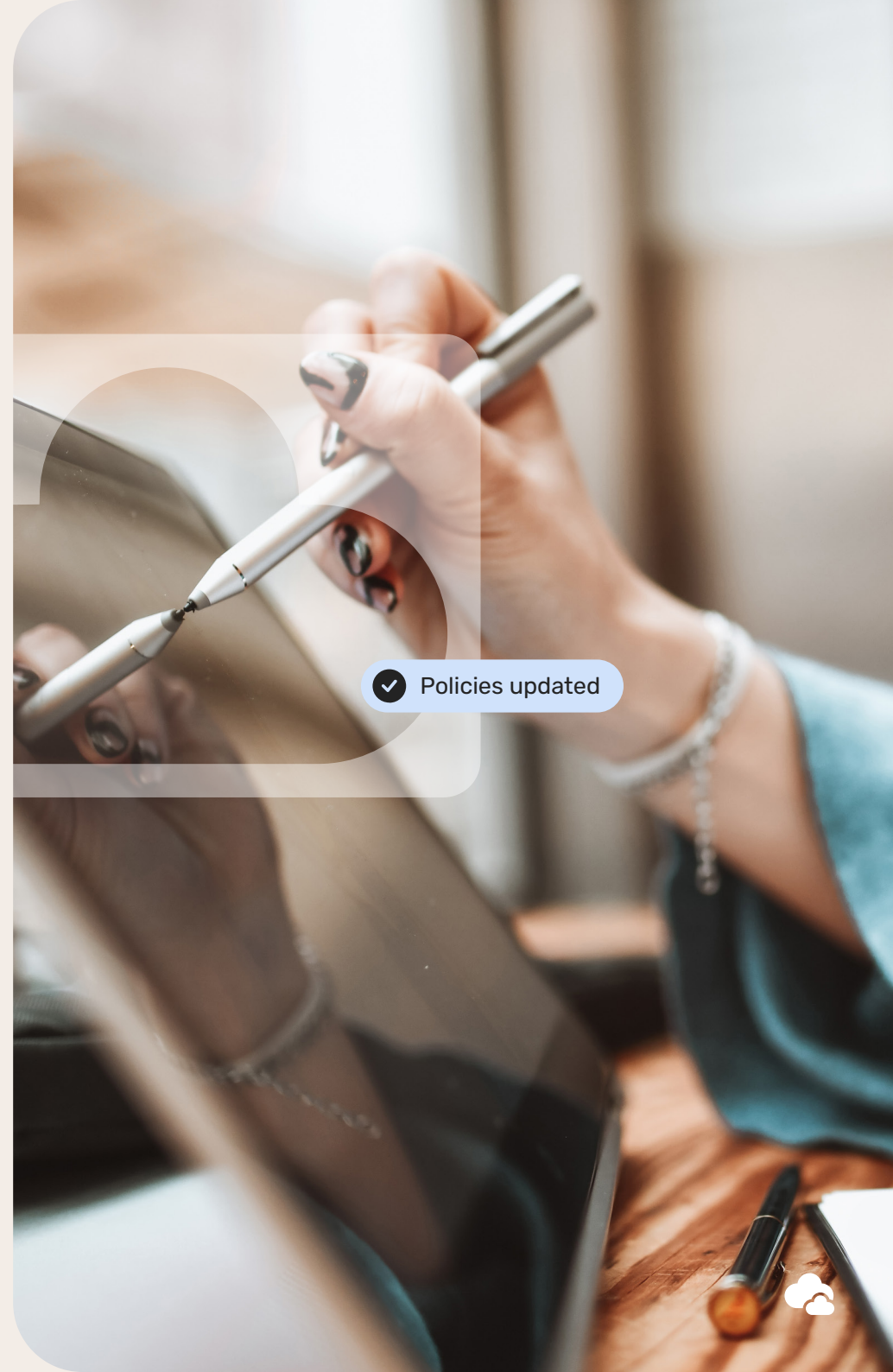
### 4. Stay compliant with new legislation changes

HR software helps your business stay compliant with ever-evolving regulations, no matter your industry.

It helps you stay on top of the latest laws and workplace requirements, from employee rights to safety standards and data protection. By automating compliance tracking and reporting, HR software reduces the risk of costly fines and legal issues – so you can focus on running your business smoothly while keeping your workforce informed and protected.

### 5. Reduce HR-related stress

With processes simplified, time saved, and data stored securely, you'll no longer need to worry about holiday request slips being lost, paperwork going missing or losing track of who's off & when – saving lots of unnecessary admin for you and your team.



## 6. Enhance the employee experience

By offering a modern, centralised system instead of old-fashioned paper documents and forms, or messy spreadsheets, you'll impress new employees right from the start of their journey with you. Even simple things such as online org charts make a new starter's experience smoother and make it easier for them to get to know your business.

Having an employee mobile app included in your HR software is also a great way of making your processes more enjoyable and convenient for everyone – even with simple things such as booking holiday or claiming an expense.

## 7. Access from anywhere

As most HR systems are now cloud-based, you can log in and access employee data wherever you might be. Historically, license-based systems meant access was limited to just one computer.

Now, whether you're at home, at your workplace or out & about – everything you'll ever need will be right at your fingertips.

→ View upcoming leave





## 8. Save money

As a small business, watching the pennies is likely to be a top priority.

But with time-consuming admin taken care of – which could otherwise be someone's full time job – your bank balance will soon be thanking you.

You'll also save heaps of paper with an online system. In fact, our customers save an average of 11 sheets of paper a day, equating to a third of a tree every year. What better way to become more eco-friendly?

## 9. Self-service

Breathe provides a self-service platform that empowers your workforce.

Employees can log in to update their profiles, submit holiday requests, and log sickness independently – all from the mobile app, whether they're in the office, at home, or on the go.

Line managers can also easily access the software to approve requests, monitor absences, and manage schedules, ensuring efficient team coordination from anywhere.





# 6 signs you need HR software



New to HR software? Are you still paper-based, using spreadsheets or an outdated system that can't keep up with your basic needs? While these methods can do the job, they're time-consuming, stressful & unnecessary.

## Telltale signs it's time to try HR software:

### → Your people are overwhelmed by HR tasks

As your business grows, so does your team. While that's great, it also means more admin, paperwork and manual spreadsheets – whether it's just you, a dedicated HR team, or even office managers and operations staff handling HR duties.

An HR system can automate and simplify these tasks, **helping everyone stay organised and reducing stress across the board.**



### → High employee turnover

Are more people leaving than usual? It might be a sign that your solo HR experts or non-HR people covering HR, are too stretched to address issues and it's making them unhappy.

With HR software, your employees can save time on daily admin tasks, giving them more time to focus. Spot the problems before they get worse.

Using tools like Breathe's **Employee NPS feature**, you can see how your employees really feel, gather feedback to make improvements and track your progress over time. **Speak to your HR Consultant for more information.**



#### Employee NPS survey

How likely are you to recommend us as a place to work?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



## → Improve your employee onboarding

Companies with a structured onboarding programme keep 58% of employees for 3 years. The first few weeks are critical for making a good impression and helping new hires settle in.

**HR software makes this easier** by sharing documents digitally, tracking progress, and ensuring new starters are on track.

With tools like Breathe's Learn add-on, you can enroll them in key courses like health & safety and data security. Plus, an organisation chart helps them get to know their team quickly. **Speak to your HR Consultant to learn more.**

### Data security

Assign people to course



## → Data gets lost

Are you still using paper-based processes or spreadsheets to manage employee data? Relying on paper or shared spreadsheets can lead to lost files, missed information, and overlooked holiday requests, all of which create significant GDPR risks. With Breathe, all data is securely stored in the cloud, ensuring easy access and full compliance.

Plus, Breathe is ISO27001 accredited, meaning it meets the **highest standards for data security**, so you can rest easy knowing your employee data is protected.





## → Making mistakes?

Manual HR processes can lead to mistakes – like inaccurate holiday allowances, missed deadlines, and misplacing information.

By automating tasks with Breathe, you reduce errors and keep records accurate, giving you peace of mind and confidence that everything is in order.



## → Communication breakdown

Lack of effective communication can lead to confusion. Breathe centralises messaging, ensuring your team stays informed about changes and updates in real time.

**“The dashboard is a game-changer for us – it gives us a clear view of everything at a glance, from sickness and leave requests to important dates. The user-friendly design and the [option to download the app for self-service](#) make it even better.**

**We love how easy it is for our team to manage their own requests, which [helps keep everything running smoothly.](#)”**



Breathe customer – Kirsten Wells, HR Officer,  
Family Law Partners

Leave request




**Farah Murray**

02/06/2025 - 13/06/2025

[view leave around these dates](#)

[approve leave](#)

### Company highlights

-  4 on holiday
-  1 off sick
-  2 Birthdays

# What should you **look for** in HR software?



## ✓ Employee database

As a UK employer, you're legally required to keep your employee data safe and secure – so it's important you look for a solution that offers a secure employee database.

With this in place, you'll be able to store employee records digitally and all in one place, rather than in filing cabinets or spreadsheets.

## ✓ Self-service

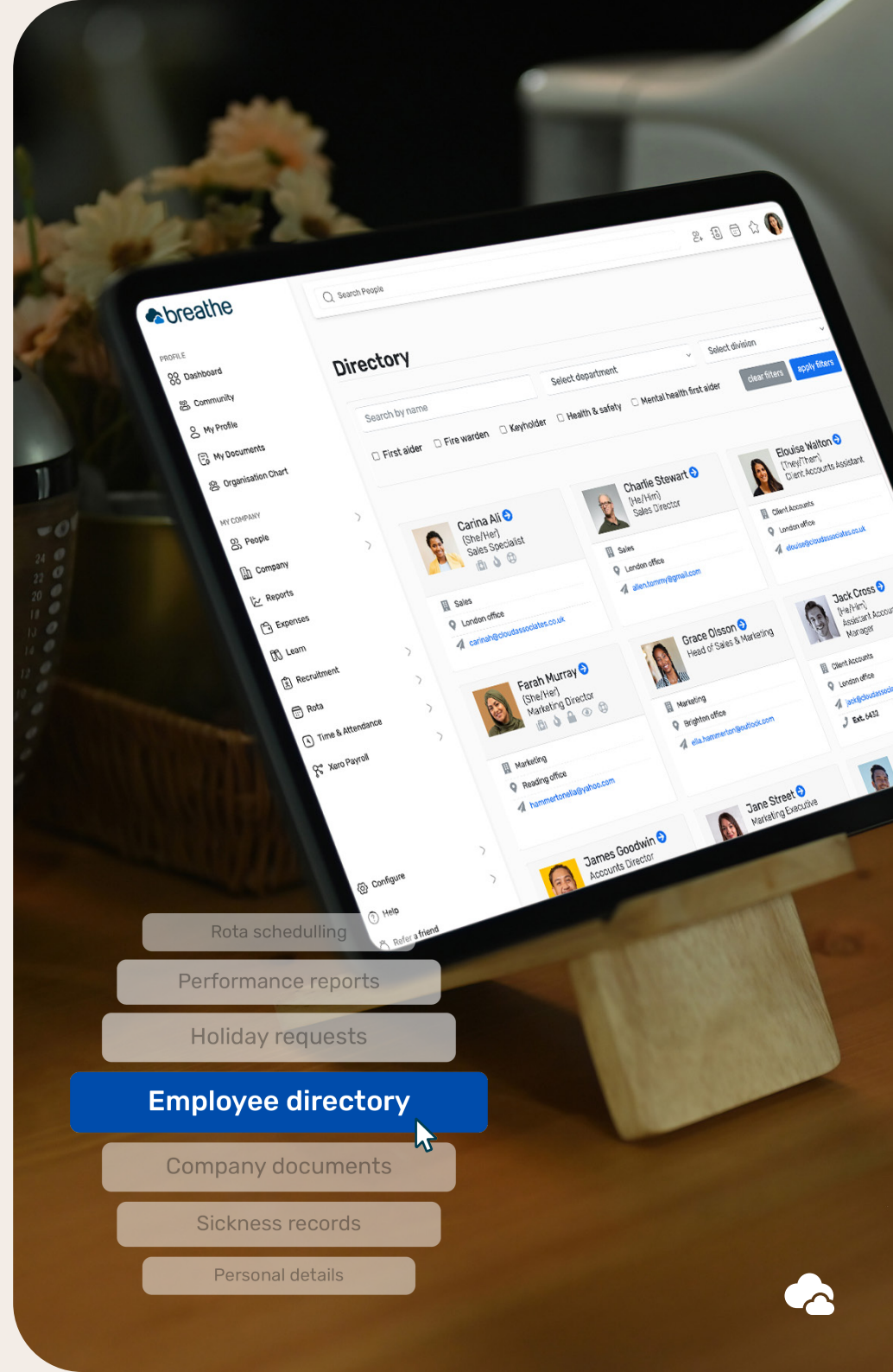
With their own profile & log-in, employees can update their own information, submit holiday requests, log sickness (and loads more) completely independently. We'd recommend that you look for a solution that has an employee mobile app included, too.

Line managers will also be able to enjoy a self-service platform, where they can log in to respond to holiday requests, monitor sickness, build rotas and more.

## ✓ Commitment-free

With a flexible, commitment-free plan, you can rest assured that you're not tied in and can cancel at any time should you need to.

We'd recommend looking for a solution that offers a free trial so that you can 'try before you buy', as well as the ability to cancel or upgrade at any time. Flexibility is key.



Rota scheduling

Performance reports

Holiday requests

**Employee directory**

Company documents

Sickness records

Personal details





## ✓ Holiday & sickness management

With a dedicated system to help you manage leave and sickness, you can ditch spreadsheets, post-it notes, emails and wall-charts.

Holiday allowances and statutory holidays are automatically calculated, saving you hours of time. Employees can request holiday in seconds, which will go straight through to their holiday approver for review. (We'd recommend you keep your eye out for a holiday calendar, which will make it easy to check for any clashes before approving leave.)

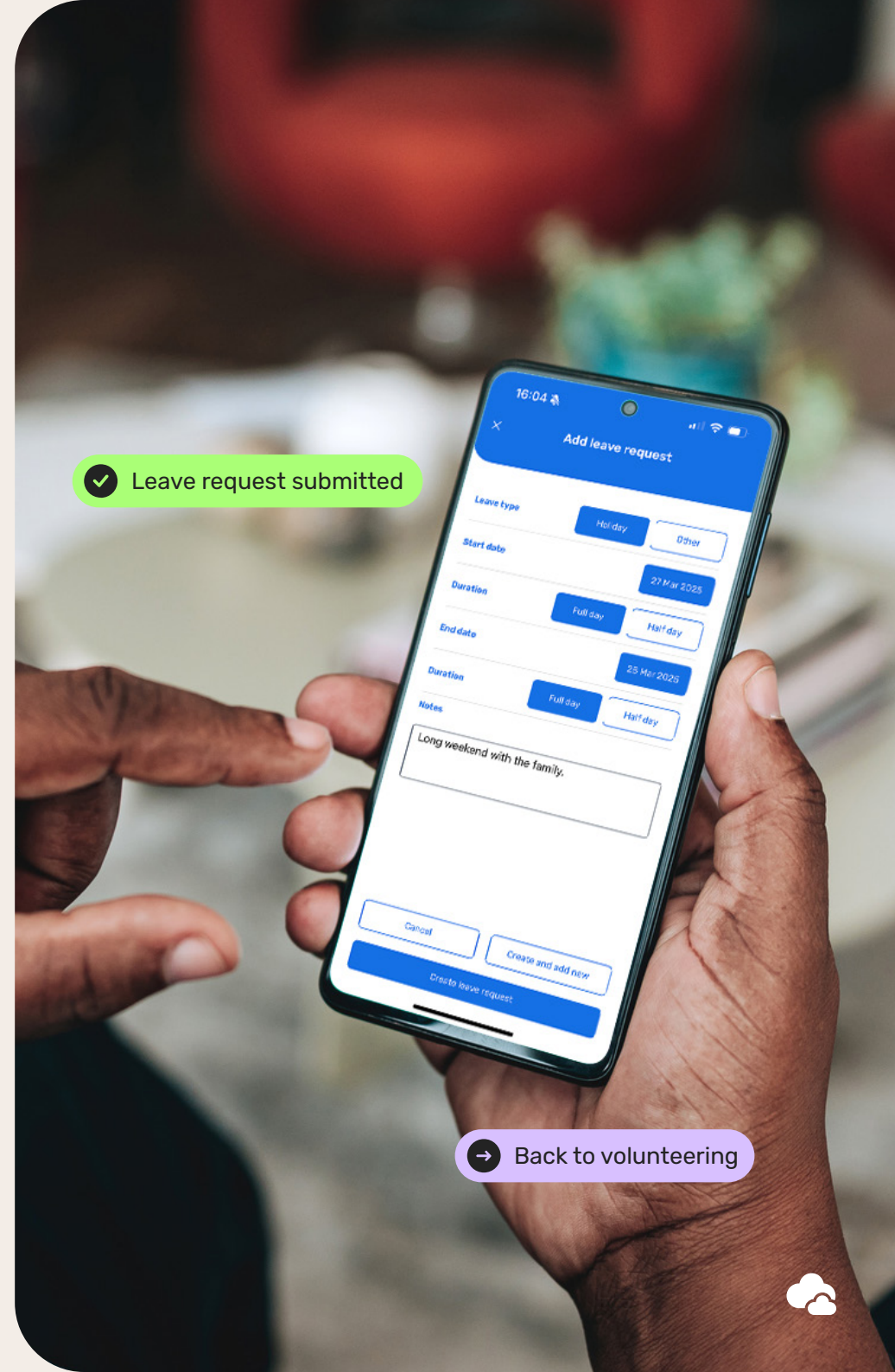
Sickness can be logged all in one place, with the ability to monitor an employee's Bradford factor, making it easy to stay on top of any trends.

## ✓ Reporting

This one is a 'must' for any HR software. With powerful reports, you can dive deeper into your people-data and easily spot any trends with sickness or performance, get a quick overview of holiday usage or instantly export any information that's needed (e.g. birthdays or emergency contacts).

## ✓ Unlimited document storage

You'll have the ability to store company handbooks and policies, as well as personal employee documents, such as annual appraisal notes, all safely in the cloud. And with a tool that offers unlimited document storage, you can cut right back on your paper consumption (and stress, too).



## ✓ Integration with your Payroll software

This will save you hours of time. Instead of updating employee details in each system, the two systems will talk to each other and keep all employee information up to date. No more errors or manual data changes, just useful automation and extra time on your hands.

## ✓ Easy to use

Make it your priority to find a system that's designed to be easy to navigate & use. After all, the last thing you want if you're trying to simplify your processes is to switch to a system that takes hours of time for you & your team to learn.

## ✓ Easy to tailor to your business

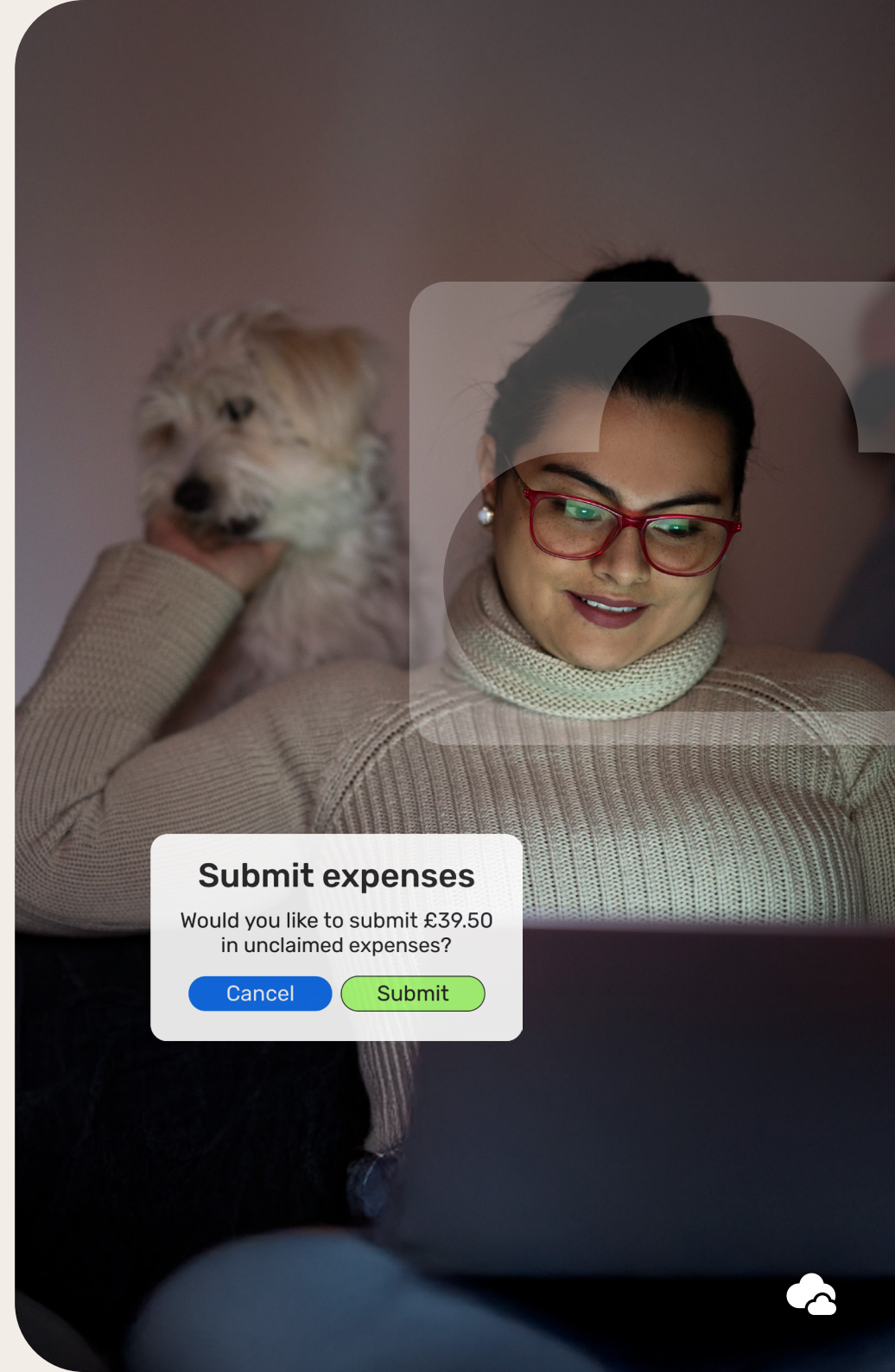
With the ability to customise your plan according to your business' needs, you'll stay in control and only pay for what you need.

For example, Breathe has a collection of value-packed add-ons that you can add to your plan where needed, including rota & timesheet management, e-learning, expense management and more.

## ✓ Super-quick set-up time

Some solutions take weeks to get up & running due to their complex processes, but it doesn't have to be this way.

Some systems – like Breathe – can be fully set up in just a few hours, thanks to its simple design and straightforward data import.





## ✓ Free trial/demo

With a free trial, you can explore each area of the system as you want to, in your own free time – with absolutely no pressure. Systems like Breathe offer a generous free trial. **Speak to your HR Consultant to get set up with your Breathe trial.**

Alternatively, you may prefer a one-to-one demonstration of the software with a member of our team.

## ✓ Cloud-based

Always look for a system that's cloud-based. **Here's why:**

- Cloud-based systems offer much more robust data security
- You'll be able to access your data from anywhere with an internet connection
- Access won't be limited to licenses (e.g. to just one computer), making it easier if you work from home or different locations.

## ✓ ISO27001 accredited

We'd recommend you look for a provider that's ISO27001 accredited. This is a certification that demonstrates the company has gone over & above to invest in the tools and systems that are needed to protect their customers' data.





# How much does HR software **cost**?



## So, how much is it going to cost?

HR software costs can vary depending on your team size and the features you need. Larger businesses may require more complex systems, which can be expensive, but smaller businesses don't have to break the bank.

**Be careful of hidden fees** – some providers charge extra for setup or integrations. But don't worry, Breathe doesn't do that. Flexibility is key, too. Look for software that doesn't lock you into long-term contracts – some options require 3–5-year commitments, which isn't ideal for smaller businesses. **With Breathe, you can commit to a monthly and flexible agreement.**

Products like Breathe are designed to be simple and easy to use, perfect for small businesses looking to save time on everyday tasks.

→ Breathe's prices start at just £22 per month for 1-10 employees, with the option to pay monthly or annually. You can also add features like Rota, Time & Attendance for as little as £10 a month. And, we cover SMEs with up to 250 employees.

**Plus, you can try the full system for free via your HR consultant. Contact them today to get started.**





How easy is  
it to **set up**?



It's easy to assume that any software package takes weeks or months to set up. And whilst this is true for many HR software solutions, this isn't always the case.

After all, no small business has the time to spare – right?

You'll want to look out for key factors that may delay the process. **These can include:**

- A clunky data upload process
- Lack of resource
- Complicated software

Luckily, Breathe is designed to be set up super quickly. In fact, some of our customers are up and running in as little as a few hours.

So, what does this process involve? **Here's an overview of Breathe's setup journey.**



## 1 Select your plan size

Time to get started. With 6 tailored plans, we'll match your SME to the one that best fits its size, headcount and unique needs.

## 2 Start your FREE 14-day trial

Try the full Breathe system FREE for 2 weeks and experience its impact firsthand. During your trial, you can set up your live account with your own employee information – no dummy data needed – so you're ready to go from day one. Our friendly team is here to help with any questions, ensuring you get the most out of Breathe for your workforce management.

## 3 Set up & customise your account

Populate your data using our handy tools and customise your Breathe account to suit your organisation.

## 4 Launch Breathe to your organisation

Send out your welcome emails and get your team up to speed with user courses. Our software is super-simple, but we have hundreds of useful guides, videos and resources to help you out should you ever need them.

Employees can also download Breathe's People Portal mobile app so they can book holiday, submit expenses and much more whilst on the go.

**Speak to your HR Consultant to get set up with a free trial.**





# Important things to consider when choosing HR software



## ✓ Return on investment (ROI)

While you're likely to be on the hunt for the right product for your business, cost is an important factor – especially as a small business.

There are usually 2 different ways that HR software is priced: either per employee, or per account, depending on which model works best for your business.

We'd recommend you search for a software that offers high return on investment (ROI). You'll want to make sure that for what you're paying out, you're getting maximum value in return.

## ✓ Easy implementation

With any new software comes some setting up. And with an already busy job, the last thing you want is having to spend several weeks (or even months) getting your new HR software up & running.

Luckily, not all solutions come with lengthy implementation times and multiple onboarding sessions. With a simple, self-service product like Breathe, you could get your business fully set up in just days, not weeks.

✓ Approve leave

→ Back to coaching





## ✓ Data security

Your HR system will store incredibly sensitive information such as addresses, dates of birth, medical information, and sometimes even salaries & bank details – and it's your responsibility to keep this safe to avoid any data breaches. It goes without saying that it's super-important that you choose a robust system that you trust to keep your people data water-tight. You should keep an eye out for:

Two-factor authentication (2FA) – this means that, as well as their password, anyone logging into their account will need to provide an additional factor that only they can source, such as a code from their mobile device. This adds another layer of security to your data, so is definitely something you should look for.

ISO27001 accreditation – as we mentioned in the last section, this is a certification that demonstrates a solid commitment to data security.

## ✓ User experience

If you're rolling out a brand-new software to your whole organisation, you'll want to choose a solution that provides an enjoyable user experience. If the software is clunky and frustrating to use, your team may be reluctant to use it & will quickly become disengaged.

Remember that HR software contributes to the employee experience at your business – right from a new starter's very first day – so it's important you spend some time considering the user experience.



**"When I think about Breathe, I'd say it's simple in the best way – it's incredibly easy to use. It's efficient, it streamlines our processes, keeps records on track, and handles everything we need. It's adaptable, making tasks feel effortless."**



Breathe customer – Lisa Cox, Head of Operations, Casterbridge Wealth



# HR software checklist





**Here's a useful list of things you should look for when evaluating HR software.** Use this as your very own guide & tick each one off as you go.

#### → Workforce Management

- ☐ Sickness tracking
- ☐ Absence Management
- ☐ Holiday management
- ☐ Flexible working
- ☐ New hire onboarding & offboarding
- ☐ Expense management
- ☐ Recruitment & applicant tracking (ATS)
- ☐ Rostering & Timesheets

#### → Insights & compliance

- ☐ Manager & employee dashboard
- ☐ Reporting
- ☐ Employee database
- ☐ Unlimited document storage
- ☐ E-learning
- ☐ Organisation chart
- ☐ Disciplinary/grievance management
- ☐ DEI considerations (Diversity, equity and inclusion)

#### → Performance Management

- ☐ Reviews and feedback
- ☐ Training

#### → Employee engagement

- ☐ Feedback & suggestions
- ☐ Company announcements
- ☐ Employee recognition – kudos
- ☐ Mobile app experience

#### → Marketplace

Integrations and partnerships with leading technology providers (e.g. payroll, financial wellbeing, AI support etc)

#### → Getting started

- ☐ Free trial
- ☐ No lengthy contracts
- ☐ Built with SMEs in mind
- ☐ Fast implementation
- ☐ Ability to grow with your business
- ☐ Value for money

# Who are Breathe?

We believe putting people first is key to leading a successful business and we're not the only ones. **Over 15,000 SMEs across the UK** use Breathe's award-winning software to support their people and streamline their HR operations. With Breathe, holiday management, rostering, performance and more becomes effortless.



## Hassle free

Breathe's simple and easy-to-use software means you don't need to be a tech whizz



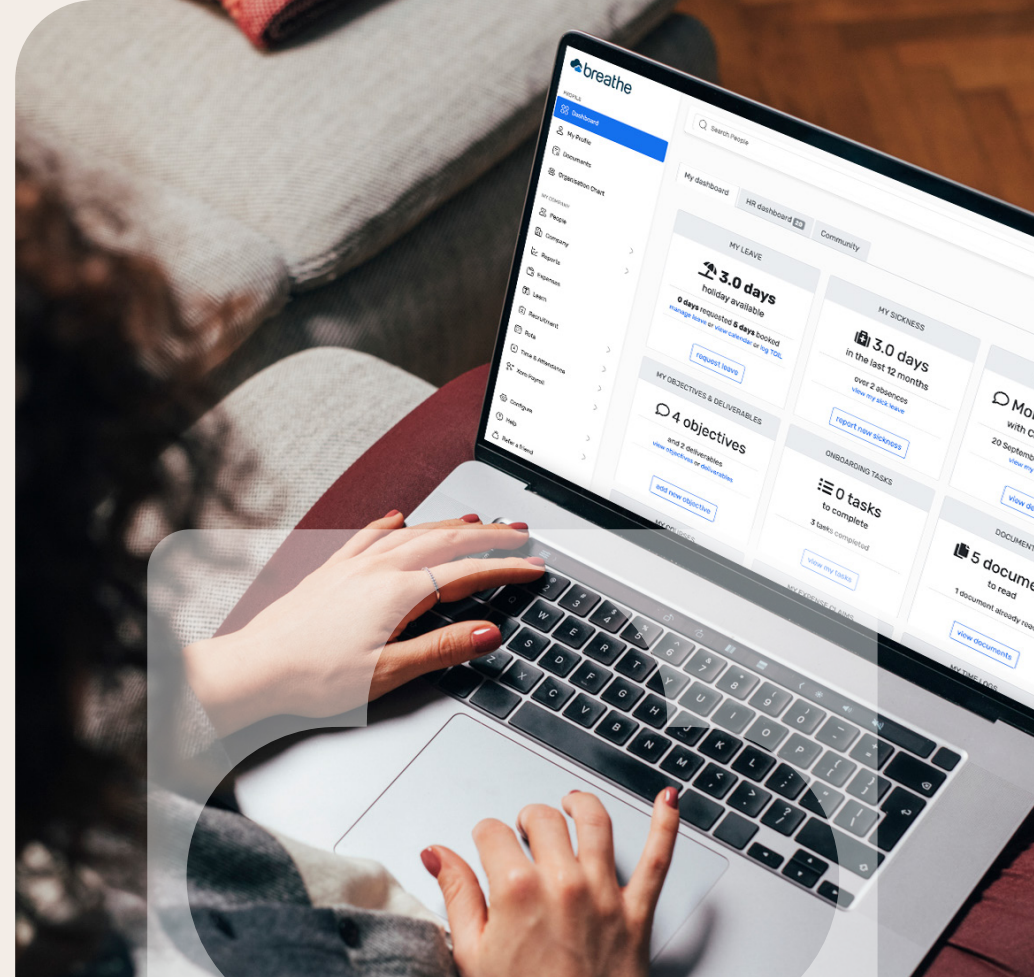
## No strings attached

No lengthy contracts and you'll be up and running quickly



## Trusted since 2012

We've been supporting SMEs for 12 years, so we know what's important to you



**"Breathe includes so many features for its price point. Their support team is fabulous and answer our questions very fast and with ease"**

Alison, Chief Administration Officer



500+ reviews

★★★★☆ 4.4





# Workforce management

Manage holiday, flexible working, weekly rotas and much more with Breathe to accelerate productivity and accountability across your workforce.

## ✓ Features

### Holiday and leave management

Keep track of holiday requests, adjustments, usage and be notified of any changes so you can plan ahead.

### Sickness tracking

Record unplanned leave to understand impact of frequent short-term absences with the Bradford Factor indicator.

### Flexible working

Accommodate a modern workforce and manage flexible working requests and changing shift patterns.

### New hire onboarding & offboarding

Tailor the onboarding journey for new starters so they hit the ground running.

## ✓ Why Breathe?

- ✓ Optimise resource for better staff allocation
- ✓ Effective planning reduces risk of absenteeism
- ✓ Maintain your competitive edge

## + Add-ons

### Breathe Rota, Time & Attendance

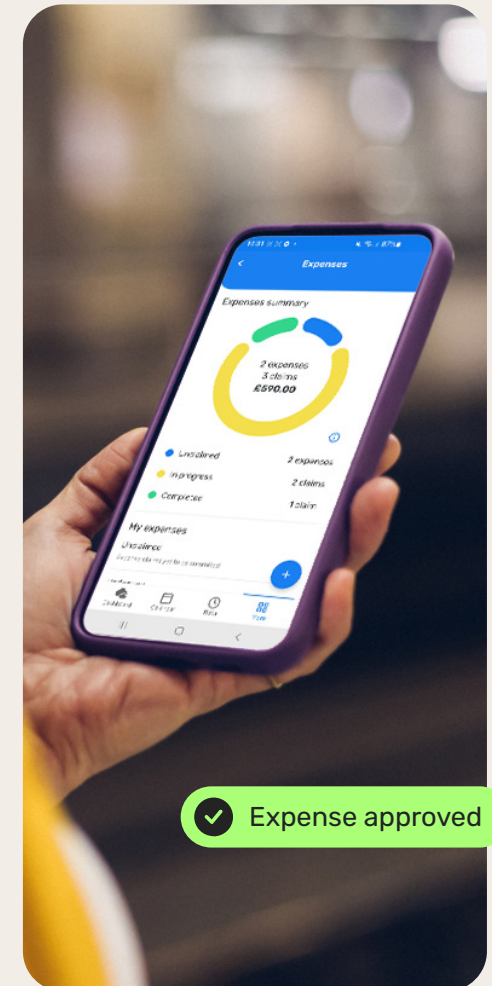
- ✓ Staff rostering
- ✓ Timesheets
- ✓ Overtime management
- ✓ Shift swap
- ✓ Clock in/clock out

### Breathe Recruitment

- ✓ Unlimited job postings
- ✓ Applicant tracking
- ✓ Shortlisting

### Breathe Expenses

- ✓ Expense history
- ✓ Role based approval
- ✓ Mobile access



# Insights & compliance

Centralise your HR operations in one easy-to-use software. With a suite of dashboards and reports, you can better understand your people needs and optimise your resources to make more informed decisions.

## ✓ Features

### Dashboards & reports

Real-time insights to highlight jobs to be done.

### Contract & document management

Store important documents securely in one place and assign to action when needed.

### Tailor access based on role and responsibilities

Based on your role, you'd have access to exactly what you need.

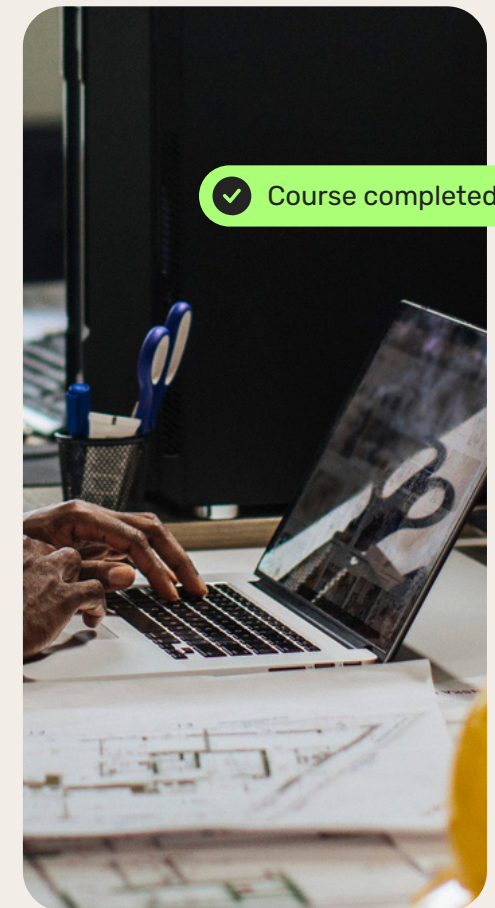
## ✓ Why Breathe?

- ✓ Strengthen compliance across your business and mitigate risk
- ✓ Drive long-term success and stay competitive
- ✓ Stay innovative & adaptable with information at your fingertips

## + Add-on

### Breathe Learn

- ✓ Fill knowledge gaps and stay compliant
- ✓ Bite-size courses, including courses aligned to UK legislation, such as:
  - GDPR
  - Discrimination & equal opportunity
  - Sexual harassment awareness
  - Acceptable internet use
  - And more





# Performance management

Open communication on performance and goals keeps your team on track. Equip them with the tools to make a real impact.

## ✓ Features

### Objective setting

Collaborate on objectives and link these with company goals so both you and your team grow.

### 1-2-1s

Schedule regular 1-2-1s with your team and link them to your work calendar so you never miss a meeting.

## ✓ Why Breathe?

- ✓ Set clear expectations so your team feel supported
- ✓ Motivate and recognise employees, supporting them to thrive
- ✓ Increase accountability and job satisfaction

## + Add-on

### Breathe Learn

- ✓ Bite-sized courses designed for all learning styles
- ✓ Courses include:
  - Leadership
  - Emotional intelligence in leadership
  - Business ethics for managers
  - And more



# Employee engagement

Create a productive, creative environment that empowers employees and keeps them motivated.

## ✓ Features

### Employee NPS

Your team can have their say. Use employee feedback to make improvements that allow your business to grow.

### Employee Suggestions

Make employee suggestions a superpower to drive growth and collaboration.

### Announcements

Reach your team from anywhere and stay connected.

### Kudos

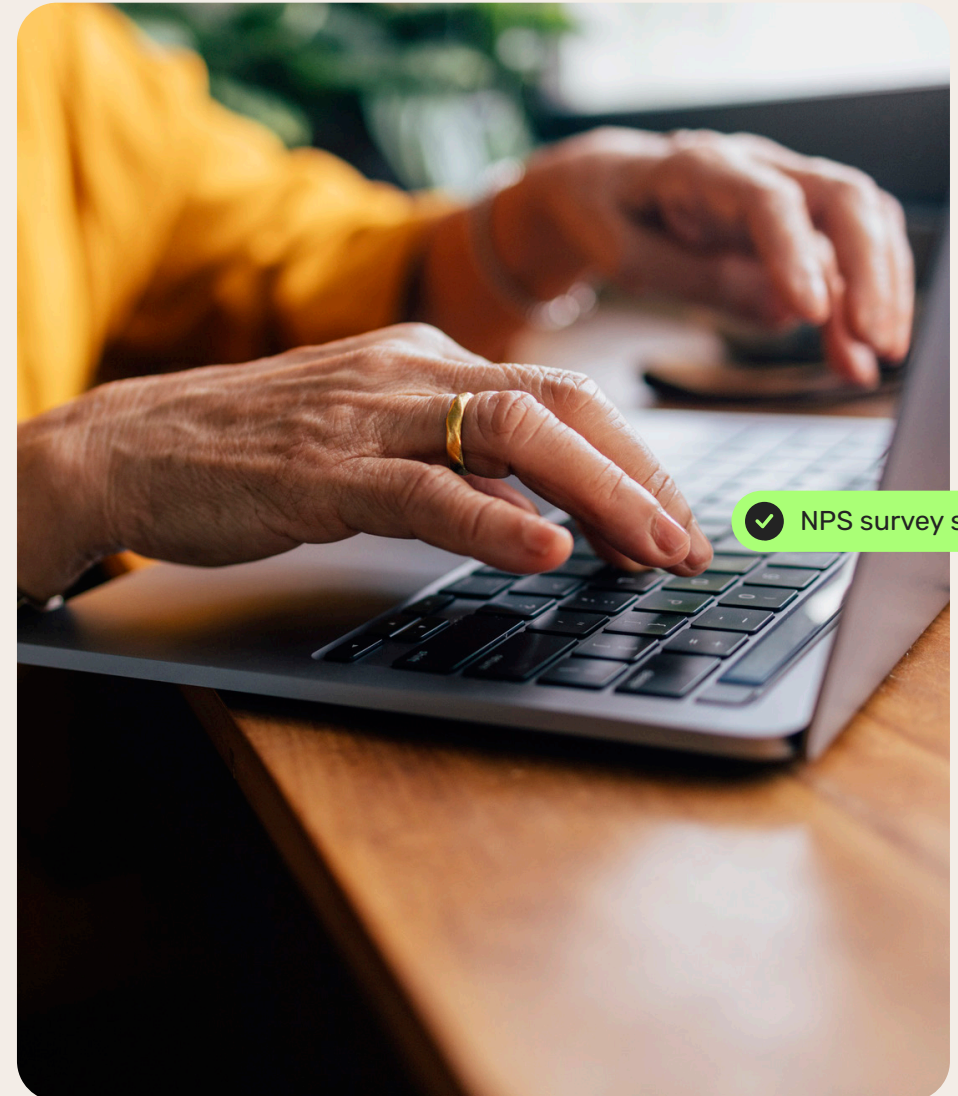
Make someone's day - let your colleagues know you appreciate them and send them Kudos.

### Burnout Monitor

Anticipate your teams work schedule to make better staffing decisions.

## ✓ Why Breathe?

- ✓ Strengthen workplace culture so your people stick around
- ✓ Listen to employee feedback to make informed decisions
- ✓ Celebrate achievements to keep your workforce energised





# THE POWER OF **FOCUS**



Speak to your HR Consultant today on 01522 275105