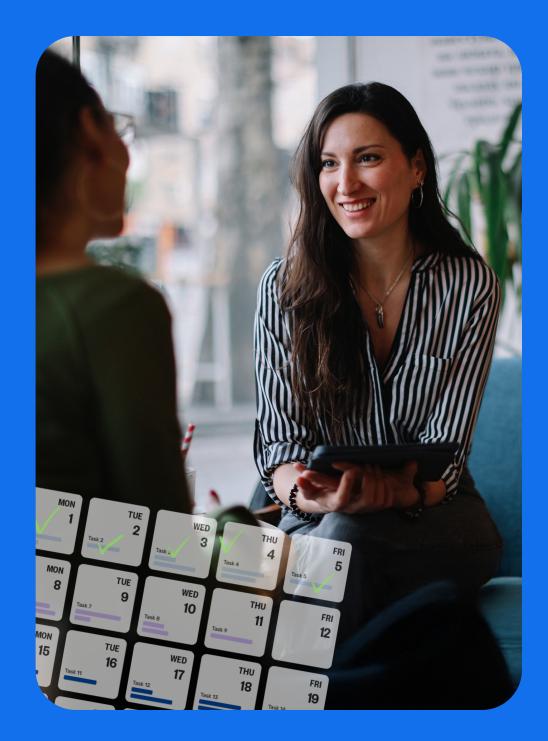
SME essentials

Your simple 6-week plan for the new financial year

A week-by-week action plan to get ahead





Introduction

How often do people say to you, "I can't believe it's been a year already"? It's just like the new financial year; it comes around every 6th April quicker than a flash. With more changes and preparation needed year by year, it's time to remove the stress and take the time to review, reset and realign your HR practices to support your business goals.

For SMEs, where HR responsibilities often fall on office managers, operations staff, business owners, or the solo HR employee, having a clear and actionable plan is essential. Think of this plan as a roadmap to help you tackle HR tasks, stay compliant, keep your people (and you) happy and set the tone for a productive year.

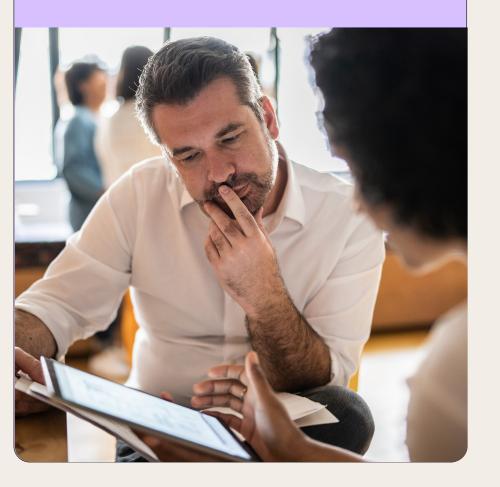
Over the next 6 weeks, your focus will be:

- **Review and organise:** Take a look at where things stand with an audit. Check that your data is accurate, see where you're at with rules and regulations, as well as essential HR year-end tasks.
- Compliance: With so much Employment Law change coming

 it's time to prepare for changes now.
- **Performance and engagement:** Review how performance and engagement are shaping up and what can be done next.
- **HR initiatives:** Focus on key HR tasks for the year ahead and make a plan for what you will develop.
- **Communication, clarity and connection:** Create a clear plan to share important HR strategies, updates and improve communication in the workplace.
- **Final preparation and tools:** Use this moment to reflect on challenges, learn from them and apply insights to improve HR practices for the upcoming year and set a positive tone for the year ahead.

This practical plan breaks down fundamental HR tasks into manageable steps, helping you stay organised and proactive without feeling overwhelmed *breathe*.

Let's get started...



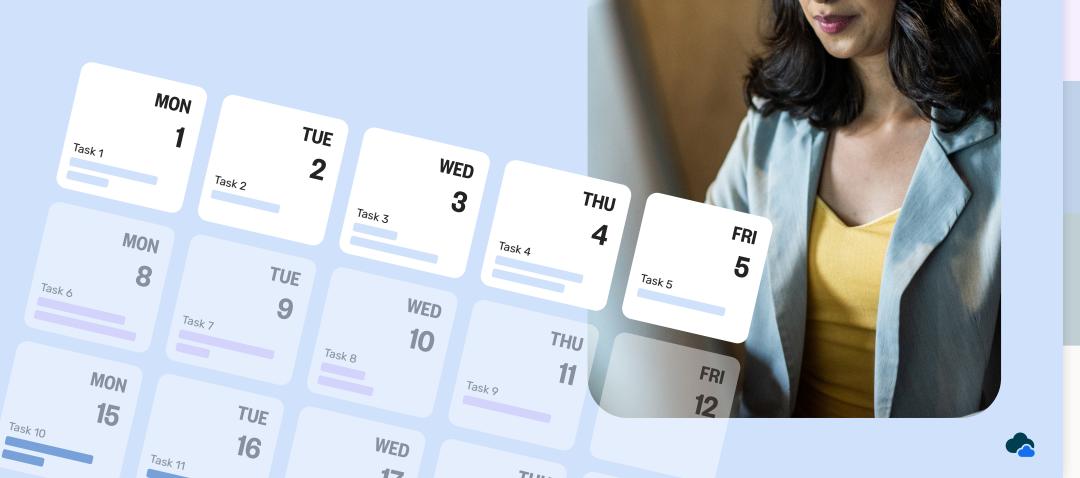


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Audit, review and organise



Week

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Task 1 When's the last time you audited your employee records?

It might sound simple, but aside from the admin burden employee records can bring, maintaining up-to-date employee records can also save you from any potential claims or issues. For example, if an employee took you to an employment tribunal for a personal injury claim at work, you may need to share safety training records or details for sick pay.

You can find a <u>full list here</u> of what employers should keep on record for their employees. Make a start with the points below.

1. Audit and update employee records, including personal details.

Action

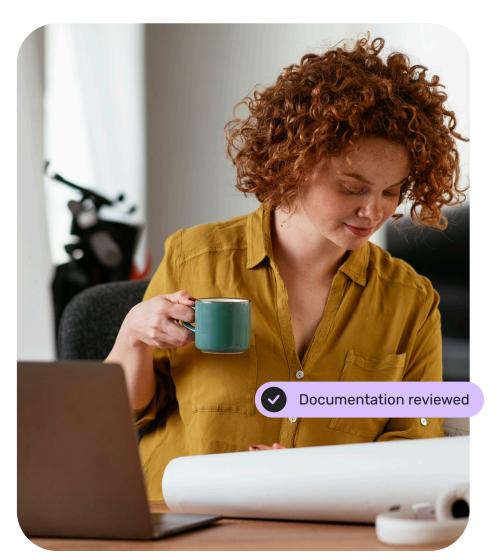
Check and update:

- → Job details, position, hire date and employment contracts
- → Name, address, emergency contacts, phone numbers, next of kin details
- → Salary, annual pay reviews, bonuses, bank account information
- → Standard working hours
- → Leave records
- → Training, certifications, licenses and permits (if applicable)

2. Review right-to-work documentation.

Action

Audit sponsorships and make sure they follow UK immigration laws.



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3. Ensure signed contracts of employment are on file.

Action

Confirm all signed contracts are collected and stored properly – either digitally in a protected system or physically in a locked filing system. These should be easily accessible when needed for reference or audits

4. Verify job titles and roles.

Action

Check the accuracy of current roles, job descriptions and reporting lines.

5. Update any disciplinary actions and grievances records.

Action

Ensure records reflect any formal actions in line with company policy. Here are some <u>free templates</u>, if you need more information about covering disciplinary procedures.

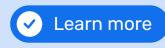
6. Review health & safety records.

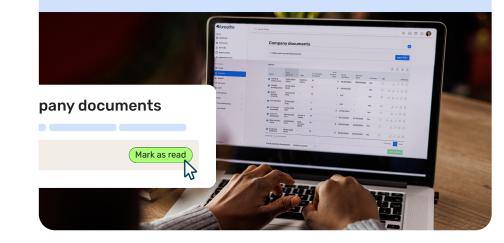
Action

Ensure that health-related documentation, such as workplace injury reports and risk assessments, are up to date.

Critical takeaway

When it comes to data protection, **employee records must be stored securely and in line with UK legislation**. This means they must be protected from unauthorised access and data breaches. Unsure if your current storage system meets these legal requirements? Try Breathe's <u>HR document management software</u> for free – for secure, compliant storage.





Task 2 It's time to level up your business training and development needs

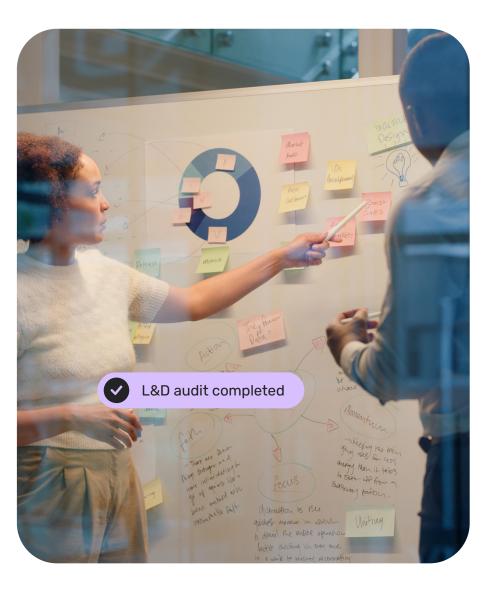
Are there any gaps you currently have? Is someone behind on that mandatory piece of training? Have you checked the feedback from employees who went on a recent course? Now's the time to make sure your employees are up to date with compliance, skillset and are ready to support business goals.

1. If you haven't done so already, it's time to complete an audit on your training and development.

Actions

- Mandatory training: Check that all required training (like GDPR, sexual harassment prevention and health & safety) is up to date.
- Skills gaps: Look at roles and performance data to identify skill gaps and prioritise training needs.
- Training budget: Set aside a budget for upcoming training needs, making sure there's enough for both required and growth-focused initiatives.
- Training effectiveness: Review feedback and performance data to see how past training went and use that to improve moving forward.

Top tip: <u>Breathe's Learn add-on</u> offers up-to-date e-learning courses on key topics like GDPR, discrimination and sexual harassment prevention, with automation for tracking progress, ensuring compliance and giving you full visibility of who's completed training.



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Task 3 Holiday time. Let's tidy up absences and review annual leave

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Now's a good time to review employee holiday usage. Whether tracking by financial or calendar year, HR is responsible for managing unused holidays to ensure compliance with company policies, legal requirements and employee satisfaction.

1. Review any unused holiday

Actions

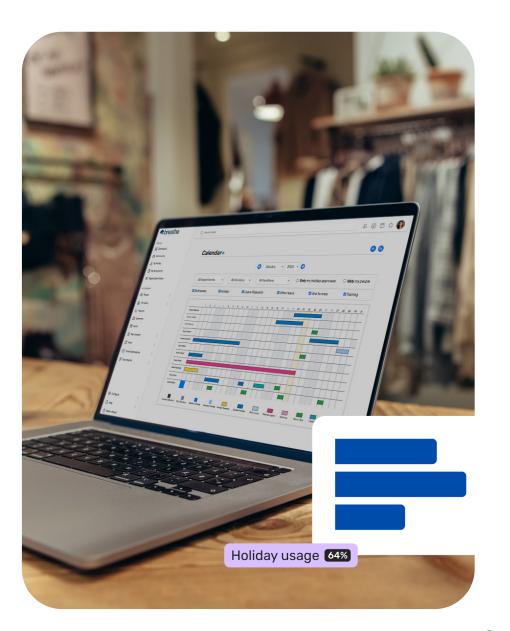
- Holiday carry-over limits: You may have a policy that allows employees to carry over some holiday. Send a reminder to these employees and share a deadline for when they need to use these holiday days by.
- Holiday pay-out: This is another option. Check if this is something your company could manage but consider budgets and workload first.
- Use-it-or-lose-it: You may have a strict 'use-it-or-lose-it' policy. If so, make sure you give employees clear comms in advance to use their remaining holiday days.

2. New holiday year comms

Actions

 Tracking employee days off throughout the year is essential for two key reasons. 1. Ensuring employees take regular breaks to avoid burnout. 2. Preventing a last-minute rush of annual leave requests that could disrupt business operations.

The <u>Breathe burnout monitor</u> is a brilliant tool to keep an eye on those who need to take a break.



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Make a short and simple plan to communicate holiday usage to your employees. Schedule regular reminders to book time off throughout the year. You can do this via email, intranet or through Breathe's company announcements.

• Check your current <u>holiday entitlements</u> and policies are correct and in line with UK employment law.

3. Review and update existing absence policies

Action

Review existing policies and update them to include: Statutory holiday entitlement, sick leave procedures, unpaid leave options, family/dependents/emergency leave, mental health days and return-to-work procedures after long-term absence, parental or maternity leave.

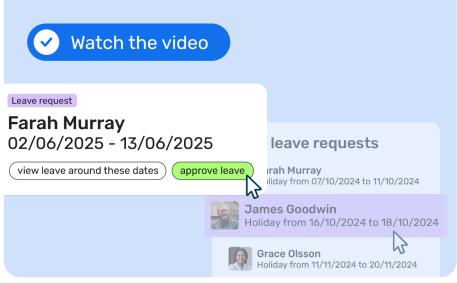


"The feature we rely on most is the holiday calendar. Breathe is the ultimate solution for holiday management. It's incredibly easy to use, allowing everyone to see each other's availability, whether they're in the office or not.

This feature is crucial for arranging team coverage and avoiding conflicts. **It's our go-to tool for effortlessly managing holiday requests and ensuring seamless operations**."

Breathe customer

Lisa Cox, Head of Operations, Casterbridge Wealth



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Task 4 Connect the dots in your workforce trends

Up next – workforce trends. HR can boost balance and retention by spotting trends in turnover, absence and engagement. Tracking diversity, performance and workload promotes fairness and highlights top talent. These insights help to create a healthier, more productive workplace.

1. Understanding workforce trends helps HR identify challenges, improve retention and support informed decision-making.

Actions

- **Turnover rates:** Look at turnover data to find patterns, like high turnover in certain roles, teams, or locations.
- Absence patterns: Review absence trends, such as how often employees miss work, how long they're absent and the reasons, to address issues like burnout or health concerns.
- Employee engagement: Create a simple, anonymous survey to measure employee satisfaction and likelihood of recommending the workplace – it could be as simple as 'Would you agree [Company name] is a great place to work?' (on a scale of 1-10).

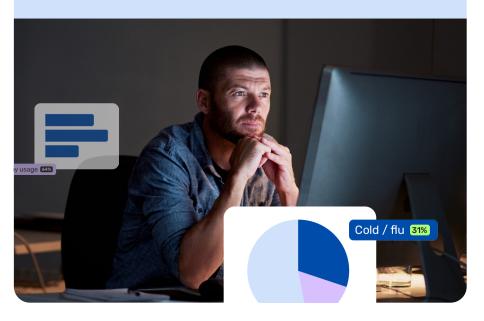
Listen to your people with Breathe's Employee NPS.

- Diversity metrics: Examine diversity and inclusion data to see how well you're doing and where more representation is needed.
- Performance trends: Analyse performance reviews to spot top performers and identify any skills gaps within teams.
- Workload distribution: Review workload data to make sure tasks are fairly distributed and no one is being overworked.

Smart move

Unable to track workforce trends effectively? With Breathe's reporting and analytics capabilities, you can monitor key metrics like turnover, absence, performance, and more, all in one secure platform. Try Breathe for free and start making smarter, data-driven decisions to improve your HR processes.

Learn more



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Task 5 Digital clean-up, it's time to tidy your tech

It's time for a digital spring clean. Keeping your digital space tidy makes HR tasks smoother and ensures everything is easy to find when you need it.

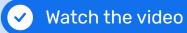
1. Clear out old files, update workflows and organise your HR tools for the new financial year.

Actions

- Archive old files: Move outdated spreadsheet files to a dedicated archive folder to declutter your workspace.
- Refresh workflows: Make your processes easier by improving spreadsheet formulas, updating templates and fine-tuning macros to try and save time and avoid mistakes.
- Organise your tools: Take time to tidy up your filing cabinets, digital documents and folders so everything's streamlined and ready to go. Make sure everything is easy to access – with passwords to secure data.
- Ready for something more efficient than spreadsheets? It's the perfect time to take <u>Breathe's free trial</u>.

"After looking at a few different HR systems, **Breathe really stood out for its balance of features and cost**. We needed something that could quickly tackle our HR challenges and Breathe was the perfect fit."

Breathe customer Tracey Murphy, HR Manager, *Tritech*







Compliance checks



Week 2

Week

Task 6 Number crunch time: Payroll and compensation changes

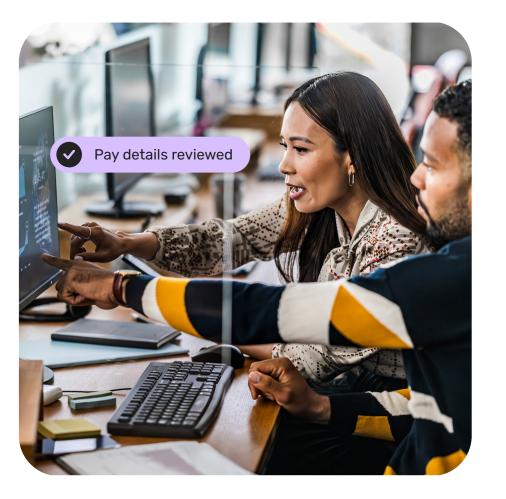
Schedule time with your finance team. It's important for HR and finance to work together ahead of the <u>new financial year (and at</u> <u>the end of the current</u>), to make sure payroll data is accurate, you're following the right Employment Laws and tax rules and that all tax-year submissions are spot on.

HR takes care of keeping employee records up to date, including pay rates, bonuses and benefits, while finance handles the actual payroll and tax submissions. By working together, you can catch any mistakes early and make sure everything's in line with the rules.

Helpful advice: Read more about payroll processes here.

1. HR and finance teams should work together to prepare for the end of the year.

- Review and clean payroll data to make sure it's accurate before submitting for the tax year.
- Cross-check salaries, bonuses and deductions to identify and correct any errors.
- Review pay details (including salaries, bonuses and benefits), to make sure they match employee agreements and follow regulations.



Task 7 Tick off your tax year checklist

It's another date to keep at the top of your mind – 5th April – the end of the financial/tax year. Make sure you have time aside to take care of employee-related data and P60s, while finance handles the tax calculations and filings. Be sure to work closely to meet UK legal requirements.

1. Your employee data should be up-to-date and accurate. You'll need to coordinate the <u>preparation of P60s</u> for employees at the end of the tax year (5th April).

Action

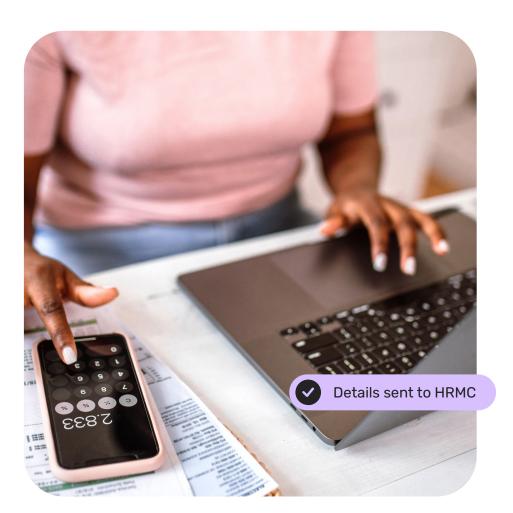
You'll need to make sure employee earnings, deductions, and personal details are all correct for <u>P60 preparation</u>, for your finance team.

Top tip: The P60 deadline is coming up – these must be issued to employees by 31st May.

2. The HR function is responsible for submitting employee payroll information to HMRC. This includes tax codes, NI contributions and earnings, via <u>RTI (Real Time Information)</u>.

Action

HR sends payroll details to <u>HMRC via RTI</u>, making sure tax codes and contributions are correct.



Week 6

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Task 8 Run a compliance health check

As Employment Laws evolve, staying compliant is crucial for smooth operations and employee satisfaction. With the Employment Rights Bill already changing, there are more changes to come in April 2025 and beyond. Now's the time to review and update your policies.

Key areas to review:

1. National Minimum Wage (NMW) increases

From April 2025, the NMW will rise to £10 per hour for 18–21-year-olds and £12.21 per hour for over-21s.

Action

Adjust payroll and policies to ensure employees are paid in line with these updates.

2. Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) changes

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) will increase from £116.75 to £118.75 per week, with a qualifying threshold of £125 per week. The proposed Employment Rights Bill may allow sick pay from the first day of illness, although there isn't a fixed timeline for this yet.

Action

Update policies and payroll systems to reflect this change.



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3. Other critical policy updates.

Actions

Ensure all workplace policies align with the latest legal requirements and company values. Key areas to review include:

- Employee benefits: Check pensions, healthcare and other benefits for compliance and fairness.
- Parental leave and flexible working: Update policies based on changes to UK Employment Law.
- Health & safety: Verify compliance with current regulations and address workplace risks.
- Diversity, equity and inclusion: Ensure policies promote a fair and inclusive work environment.

For further updates, visit <u>Breathe's Employment Law Hub</u> or <u>talk to</u> <u>our Partner team</u> who can put you in touch with one of our expert Partner consultants.

*Please note – the above covers some policies but is not limited to.

"We're constantly managing things like staff schedules, leave, training certifications, and compliance. 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*

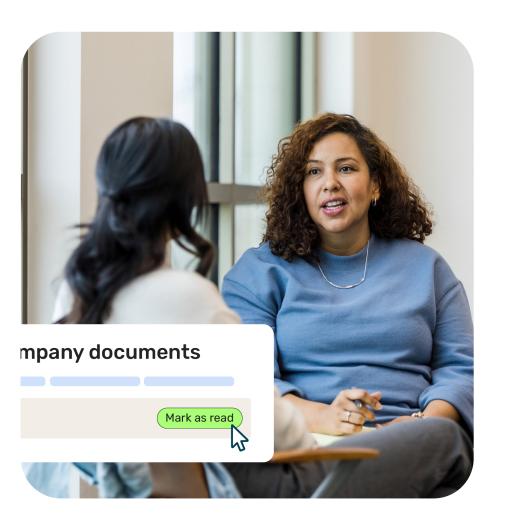


Task 9 Roll out and communicate any compliance updates

You've done the work to audit compliance updates – but have you shared this with the whole business?

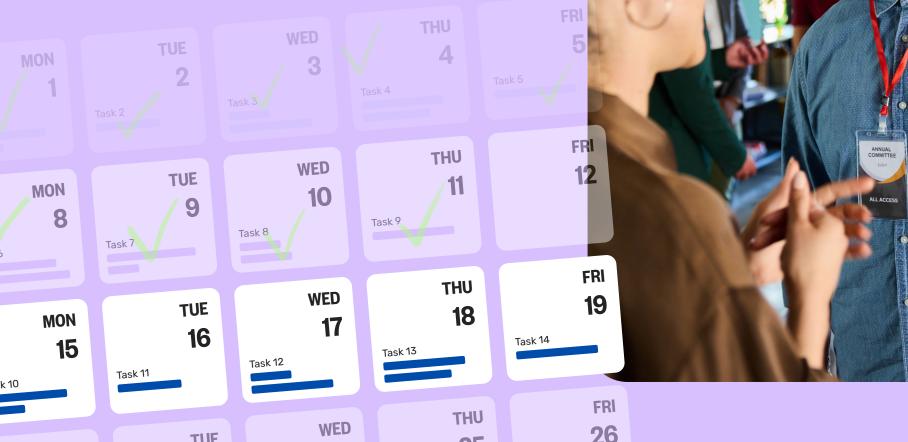
Keeping employees in the loop about legal updates helps everyone stay informed and ensures your policies are up to date. And more importantly – helps you to stay on the right side of compliance (no costly fines thank you).

- Share relevant legal updates: Let employees know about any changes that might impact them.
- Update and distribute materials: Share updated policies, handbooks, or contracts so everyone has the latest information at their fingertips.





Performance excellence and engagement





Task 10 Shine a light on team and individual performance reviews

Performance management is ultimately the responsibility of managers, and HR is here to support and empower them to handle it in the most efficient and productive way. It's not HR's job to manage everyone, but rather to provide the tools and resources that help both managers and employees thrive.

Regularly checking and updating employee development plans helps people grow, keeps goals on track and boosts overall performance.

Actions

- Check development plans: Touch base with line managers to make sure they've reviewed and updated individual development plans.
- Schedule performance reviews: Double-check that managers have set up performance reviews and 1:1s to track progress and give feedback.

Make it simple to track employee progress, arrange appraisals, set goals, and reward hard work – keeping your team engaged and on track, with <u>Breathe's performance management</u> <u>software</u>.

- Set goals: Collaborate with employees and managers to set clear OKRs or SMART goals that support both personal growth and company priorities.
- Book feedback sessions: Remind managers to set up feedback sessions with employees. This is a great time for you to also book HR feedback with employees, virtually or inperson.

Remember to:

- **Gather insights:** Let employees share their thoughts on HR processes and any ideas for the new financial year.
- Anonymous space: Make sure you've got an option for employees to be able to share feedback anonymously too.
- **Review feedback:** Go through the feedback for new ideas for the next year consider what is realistic and achievable.

Feedback can be tricky to consider, share and receive. Need some help? <u>Click here</u> for your free 'delivering effective feedback guide'.



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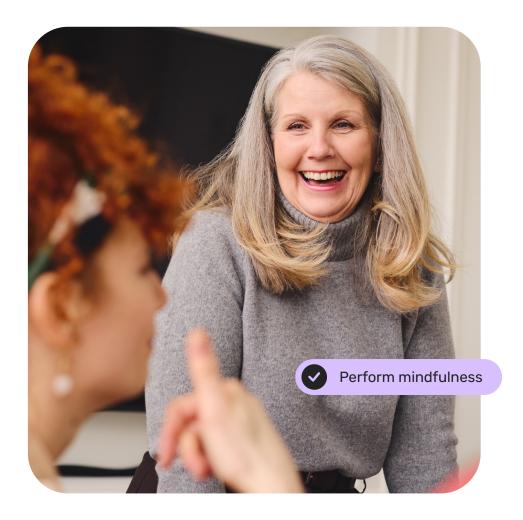


Neek 2

Whether you're in HR or juggling HR tasks in a 'non-HR' role, you're likely supporting everyone else – but what about you? This <u>Breathe wellbeing guide</u> with expert tips from Culture Coach Lizzie Benton, is just one click away. Grab a brew, open the PDF, and take a moment for yourself – you might even find inspiration for new wellbeing initiatives.

Actions

- Check in with yourself: Take a moment to reflect on your own mental health and wellbeing needs.
- Use the tools available: Whether it's <u>flexible working</u>, a wellbeing day, or other company perks, lean into what's there to support you.
- Set the example: By prioritising your own wellbeing, you show the people around you that taking care of yourself is just as important as supporting others.



Week 6

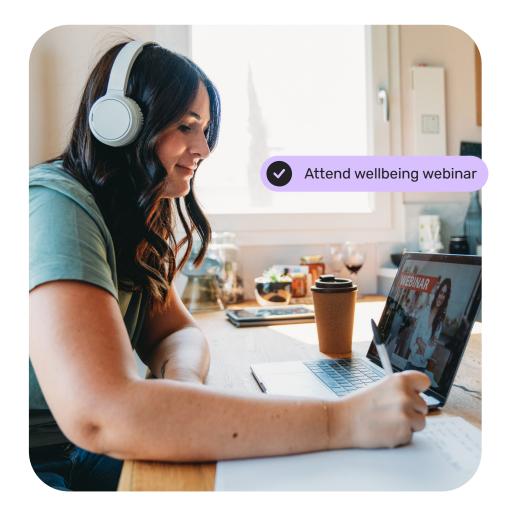


Supporting employee wellbeing is simple. Before the new financial year, review your approach and communicate clearly to build trust, engagement and a positive culture.

Prioritising employee wellbeing shows your commitment to supporting their health and happiness.

Actions

- Promote wellness resources and benefits: Share regular updates on available mental health programmes, fitness initiatives, or financial wellbeing workshops. And if you have flexible working or an EAP (Employee Assistant Programme) remind employees about these too.
- Host wellbeing webinars: Organise talks on stress management, work-life balance, or mindfulness – bring in experts to run these. Research, budget and book a date.
- Create a wellbeing calendar: Highlight awareness days or company wellbeing events to keep everyone engaged.



Week 6



Celebrate your employees' achievements consistently to boost morale, motivation and culture. If you need inspiration, here are some tips to get started.

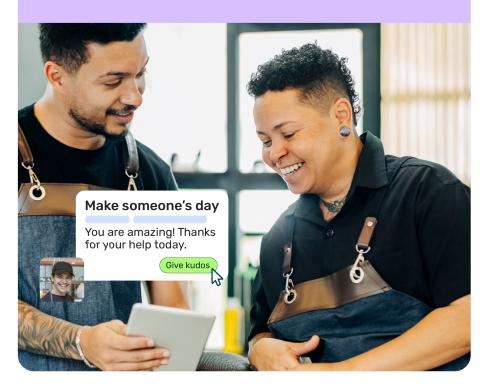
Actions

- Milestones: Celebrate important moments like birthdays, work anniversaries, and big achievements.
- Personalised recognition: Take the time to recognise specific accomplishments or milestones for each employee to make them feel valued – encourage line managers to share wins and successes.

Simple recognition tools like <u>Breathe's Kudos</u> are a quick and easy way to do this, whilst having a big and positive impact on employees.

Team celebrations: Organise team shout-outs or small celebrations to mark achievements and show appreciation. Think about budget and incentives, a prize of a team lunch could be an easy way to do this.

Boost employee engagement and satisfaction by sending your team recognition with <u>Breathe's Kudos feature</u>.



Task 14 Map out your recruitment success

How's your recruitment going? Whether you're hiring now or on pause, now's a great time to review your process and set yourself up for success in the new financial year.

Actions

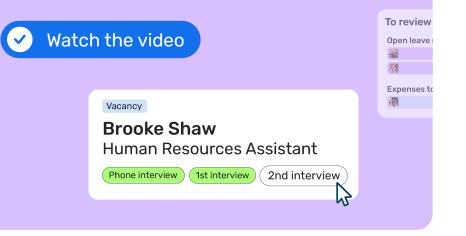
- Update job descriptions: We mentioned this earlier but refresh job descriptions to ensure they're aligned with current roles and company needs.
- Review HR software: Check how the recruitment function in your current processes is working:

Looking for something more streamlined? Breathe's recruitment software offers a seamless applicant tracking system, helping SMEs manage every step of the recruitment process – from posting vacancies and collecting applications to shortlisting candidates and onboarding, all in one easy-to-use tool.

- Assess candidate experience: Review the candidate experience, from job application to interview process, to ensure it's smooth and engaging.
- Plan for hiring needs: Take stock of any upcoming hiring needs for the year ahead and start planning for those roles.

"The recruitment module is super useful, especially when we're hiring for multiple roles. It makes storing candidate information and documents so quick and easy."

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



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Other HR projects and initiatives



Task 15 It's time to kick off your DEI initiatives

DEI initiatives aren't just a 'nice to have'. Diversity, equity and inclusion are important; now they even come with regulations in the workplace. That's right, from maternity and family leave returners, to disability and ethnicity pay gap reporting – there are a number of regulation updates you need to be keeping an eye on.

Top tip: Check out <u>this Breathe blog</u> for more information on DEI initiatives.

Planning DEI initiatives helps create a more inclusive workplace and ensures everyone feels valued.

Actions

- Review current policies: Look at your existing diversity and inclusion policies and initiatives (hopefully you have an idea from week 1 of the plan, from auditing).
- Check for legal changes: Stay up to date with any government changes or updates to the <u>Employment Rights Bill</u> that could impact your <u>DEI efforts</u>.
- Set clear goals: Define concrete goals for improving diversity in hiring, leadership, and company culture.



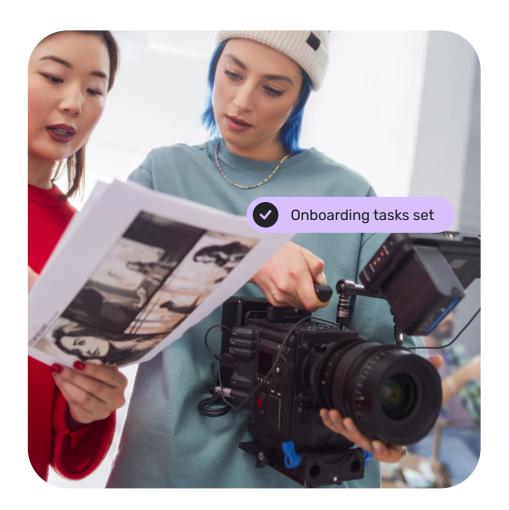
Week 6

Task 16 Create a knockout onboarding process for new hires

Onboarding a new employee can be a lot of work, but it doesn't need to be. Before the new financial year kicks off, take a look at your current process.

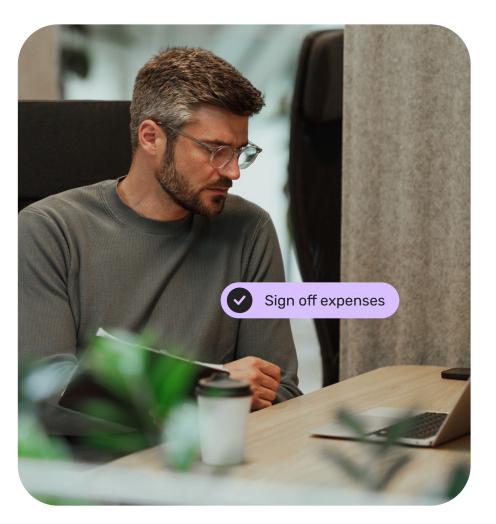
- Update for new hires: Review (and if needed, refresh) the onboarding process ahead of the new financial year.
- Revise onboarding materials: Update any onboarding documents or materials to reflect changes in policies, practices, or branding.
- Ensure compliance checks: Make sure all necessary compliance checks are integrated into the onboarding workflow.
- Review software: Breathe's <u>employee onboarding</u> <u>software</u> helps make it easier for small businesses. It streamlines and automates the whole process, saving you time right away.





Start by reviewing training expenses, finalising the employee benefits budget and tracking recruitment costs. Don't forget to document absence costs, workplace adjustments and spending on health and wellbeing programmes. By organising these details, you'll see better planning and smoother operations, making sure everything follows company policies.

- Training expenses: Review and organise expenses related to employee training programmes.
- Employee benefits budget: Compile and finalise the budget for employee benefits, ensuring alignment with planned initiatives and company policies.
- Recruitment costs: Review and report on expenses related to hiring, such as new headcount, job ads, agency fees and onboarding.
- Absence costs: Document costs associated with employee absences, including sick leave and parental leave.
- Workplace adjustments: Record any costs incurred for workplace accommodations or adjustments, such as ergonomic equipment or accessibility upgrades.
- Health & wellbeing initiatives: Review spending on health and wellbeing programmes, such as mental health support, wellness apps, or gym memberships.



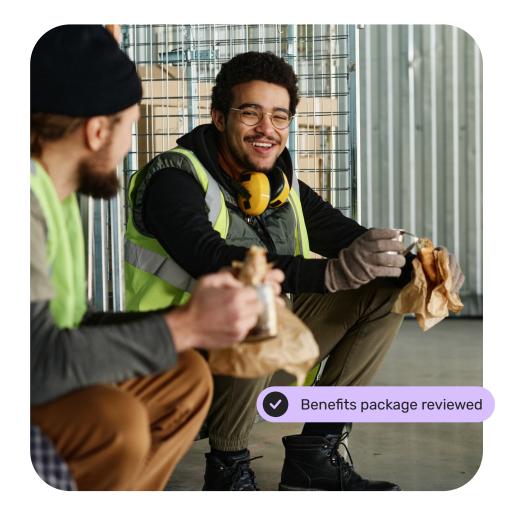


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Task 18 Revamp your benefits package for ultimate employee satisfaction

Choose the key projects you want to focus on for the new financial year. Maybe it's time to revamp your employee benefits package if it's been neglected recently – or if you've heard about other initiatives you want to bring in. Take the time to look at this now, so it can be factored into future planning.

- Survey employees: Ask employees which benefits matter most to them (like pensions, healthcare, bonuses, perks).
- Review insights: Look through the feedback to spot any trends or areas to improve.
- Assess new benefit opportunities: Think about whether new benefits are needed based on what employees are saying.
- **Plan changes:** Plan any changes or add new benefits ahead of the next financial year.







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Communication and connection



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Week

Week 4

Task 19 Master the art of storytelling your strategy

You're putting in the hard work on all your HR tasks, plans and initiatives – now it's time to keep the company and employees in the loop with those important updates.

A clear communication strategy helps keep everyone informed and aligned with HR goals and initiatives.

Actions

- Review and finalise: This should include clear plans for sharing key updates, policies and initiatives with employees, ensuring transparency, engagement and alignment with company goals.
- Create a schedule: Add what's happening when, then you can build out your comms using this, e.g. monthly company updates or quarterly team newsletters.
- Review current channels: Take a look at your existing communication channels to see what's working what channels are employees engaging with?
- Share regular HR bulletins: Consider sending out HR bulletins with key updates to keep employees informed.

Top tip: find out more about what successful communication can do for your SME in <u>this blog.</u>

Keep your team in the loop by sharing important updates through Breathe's company announcements feature, ensuring everyone stays informed and aligned.

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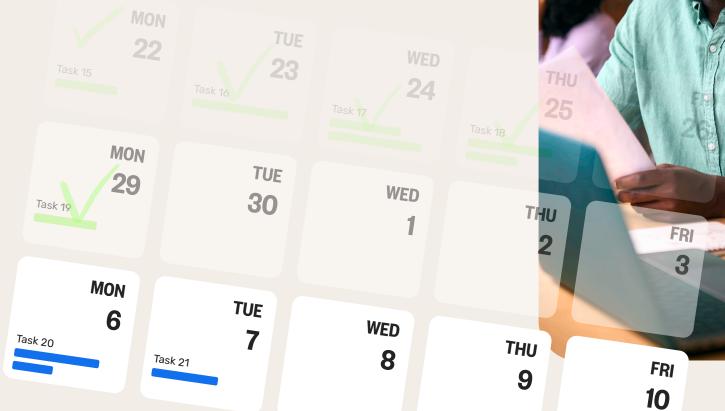
Company announcement







Final preparation and reflection





Task 20 Take a moment to reset and recharge

After a busy month of prepping for the new financial year, it's time to take a breather and reflect on everything you've done so far. A little rest goes a long way in setting yourself up for success.

Take a step back to look over your 6-week plan and all the progress you've made.

- Pause and review: It's been a busy few weeks are you where you want to be?
- Refine as needed: Spot anything that could use a final tweak or adjustment
- Book project time: If you need more time to finish this 6-week plan, pop some additional time in your diary over the next month (you'll thank yourself later) - just prioritise the urgent tasks to align to April updates.

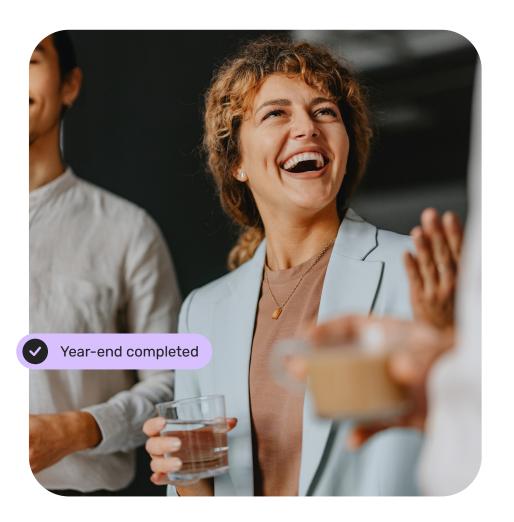


Task 21 Cheers to you - celebrate and reflect

You've come so far – not just in this 6-week plan, but throughout the entire past year. Transitioning from one financial year to the next is the perfect time to acknowledge your achievements and the hard work that got you here.

Take a moment to celebrate your milestones and successes and use this time to reflect on what worked, what didn't, and how you can make the upcoming year even more successful.

- Celebrate year-end: Take a moment to recognise both your and your team's hard work and achievements over the past year. Whether it's an email, a quick meeting, or a small virtual or in-person celebration, make sure everyone feels appreciated for their efforts.
- Reflect: Think about what worked well and where you can make things even better. What challenges came up and how did you tackle them? Use what you've learned to tweak your HR approach for the new financial year, making things run more smoothly.
- Set the tone: It's time to feel excited about what's coming next. Share a positive message about the goals, new ideas and growth opportunities for the year ahead.

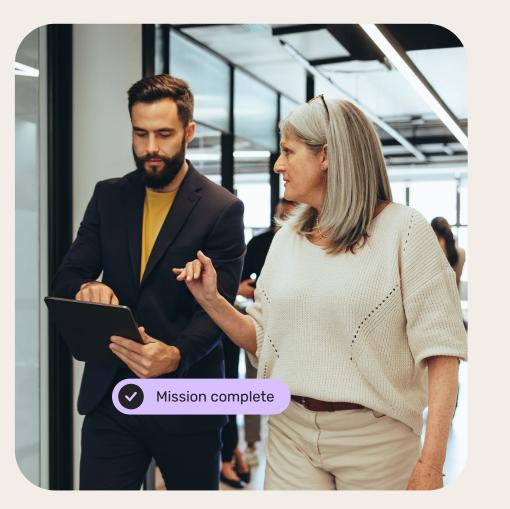


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You've made it to the end of the Breathe 6-week HR plan for the new financial year. And while this might not be the end (after all, there will still be plenty to keep you busy), you should now feel prepared and organised for what's ahead.

From completing a compliance health check and ensuring you're ready for new legal regulations in April (and beyond), to refreshing key HR processes, you've covered a lot of ground. Whether it's streamlining workflows, recognising achievements, or fine-tuning your tools, you're set to hit the ground running. Here's to a smooth transition and a successful year ahead.

*Disclaimer: This 6-week plan was updated with accurate information as of January 2025. Employment Laws are subject to change. This plan has been provided as a guide only. For specific guidance tailored to your situation, please consult an Employment Law expert or <u>reach out to our Partner team</u> who can recommend a consultant to support you.



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