Software Review

About BrightPay

BrightPay has over twenty years of industry experience in the UK and Ireland. As a team, they have a collective goal to intelligently create, successfully deliver and professionally support the best payroll and HR software and services for SMEs in Ireland and the UK.

The BrightPay website advises that their products are in use by over 60,000 employers in the UK and Ireland.

BrightPay is designed for small and medium sized businesses, bookkeepers, and other payroll bureau providers. BrightPay has achieved HMRC recognition and has passed through their own vigorous internal testing regime.

BrightPay is competitively priced at £89 + VAT per tax year for an employer licence and £199 + VAT per tax year for a bureau licence (at Sept 15). Clients benefit from unlimited employees, integrated automatic enrolment functionality and free support. Bureaus additionally benefit from unlimited employers. Bureaus gain a significant business advantage as they have an opportunity to provide auto enrolment as a chargeable service and increase revenue, at no extra software cost. Micro employers benefit from a free licence for up to three employees. Registered charities can avail of a free employer licence.

The software is RTI compliant and offers auto enrolment (AE) functionality. BrightPay does not charge for these features. The AE features allow you to select your pension scheme, make contributions, assess employees eligibility, enrol employees, issue communications, handle postponement and produce contribution files for AE pension providers. (Here, I didn't want people to think that we set up the pension scheme for them. There's a lot of confusion in this area)

BrightPay offers free support and quote "It's best for our customers and motivates us to create easy to use, problem-free software."

About this review

This review is about the payroll software offered by BrightPay and its functionality. It does not touch upon payroll in general terms.

Over the last decade I have used a number of payroll products and believe that I am well positioned to review this software due to this experience of how payroll works and how products perform to suit the requirements of a bookkeeper or payroll professional.
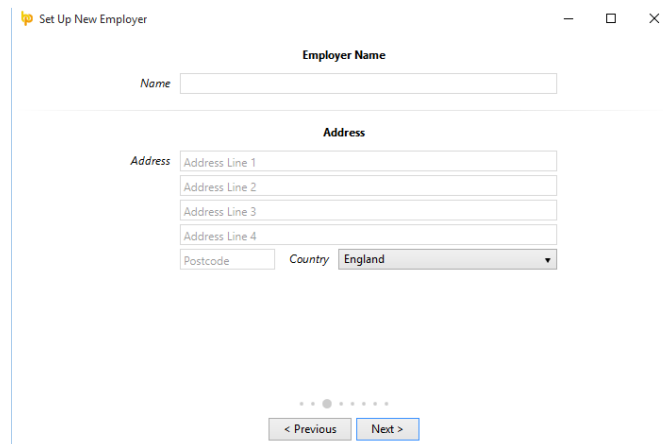
There will be no direct comparison to other payroll software providers, but I hope this review will help readers understand some of the pros and cons that will help them when choosing the software to suit their requirements.

BrightPay offer a free version of their software and also a no obligation trial period, so I was able to download the product and include some screenshots in this review.
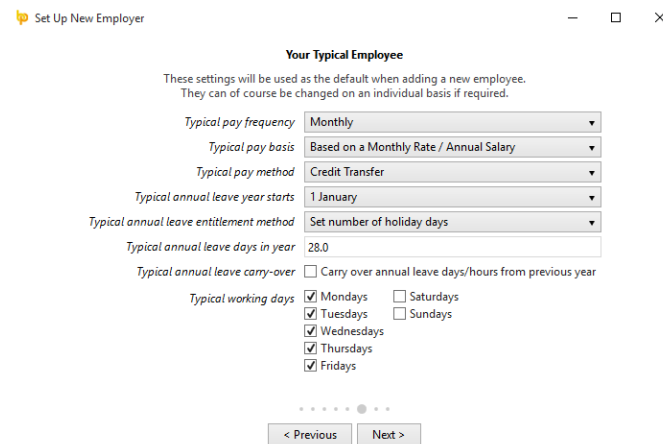
Our product overview

The product

I found the download and installation one of the easiest I have experienced. The software was loaded and ready to use in the time it took my PC to reboot. With a quick click on the desktop icon and some useful prompts, I was ready to start adding my payroll details and processing within a short time.


The software feels fresh to use, modern and its user interface is clean and crisp. I have also found BrightPay easy to navigate for the purpose of running a payroll. I feel the software will suit those new to payroll as much as the most experienced payroll professionals, as I found the software used everyday language and was easy to navigate.

The navigation, which I feel has been created with the input of many potential users, is driven through seven tabs; Payroll, Analysis, Employees, Employer, HMRC payments, RTI and Pensions. There is so much that I could cover in this review, but this is not designed to be an instruction manual, so I will cover those key features all bookkeepers and payroll professionals use on a regular basis.

I really liked the amount of information that was visible on one screen, which saved me having to switch between screens for one purpose or even remember where the information is actually added.

At this point it is worth mentioning that the migration from another payroll system has been well considered with an easy import of all the employee details. I did not test this during the review, but reading the testimonials of BrightPay this is an area that is well recognised by many other professionals.

The screen to add an employee is also well considered and captures all the key information you would expect is required by your payroll software.
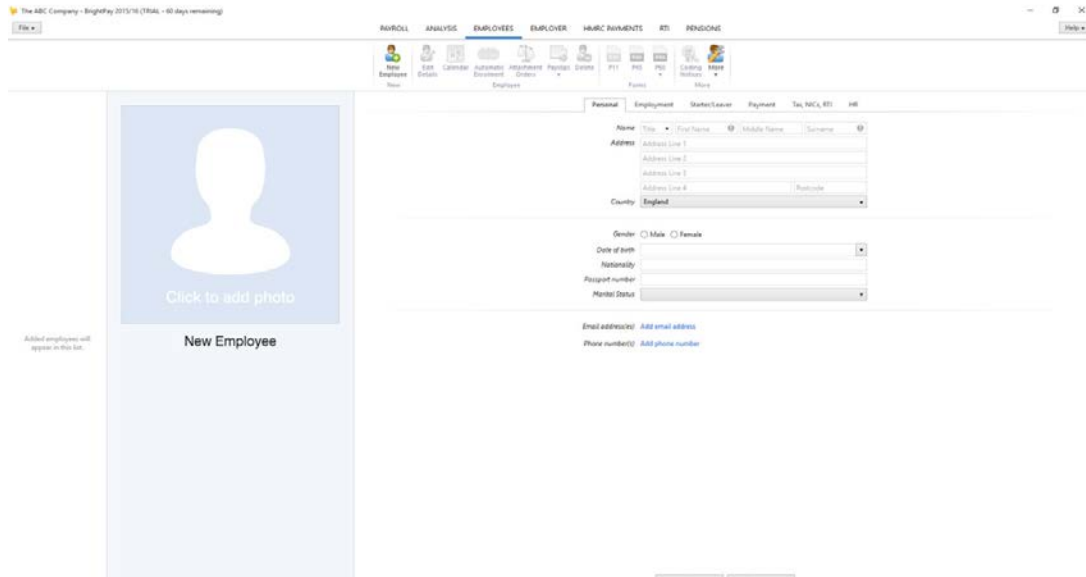
The employee record also has the nice addition of a HR tab that allows you to record any arrangements, medical information, notes and a review date.

Employees can be organised into departments, which can be used for payroll processing and analysis.

One feature I liked when I first used BrightPay, was if I missed something because I did not know which screen to apply it to or it was not required in other software, I was prompted to add or update (eg setting up the payment schedule) before proceeding.

When setting up your employees, they are listed depending on their pay cycle (weekly, monthly, etc).

When it comes to running the payroll, BrightPay is comprehensive but easy to use. The first screen is an overview snap shot of the pay run showing the gross, net and cost to employer. You can easily amend any employee payment due from this screen by clicking on their name before you move on to produce the payslips. In this case adding the number of hours for Anita Smith and a bonus for Joe Bloggs.

The ABC Company - BrightPay 2015/16 (TRIAL - 60 days remaining)

PAYROLL   ANALYSIS   EMPLOYEES   EMPLOYER   HMRC PAYMENTS   RTI   PENSIONS

Joe Bloggs Month Ending 30 September

Pay

Monthly Pay   £ 2,083.33
Add ▾

Statutory Pay
Calendar...

Additions and Deductions
Bonus   £ 1,000.00
Add ▾

Notes
Add ▾

Tax code: 1060L
NIC table letter: A
Department: (None)
Pay method: Credit Transfer

	This Period	Year to Date
Pay		£ 2,083.33
Taxable additions		£ 1,000.00
Taxable gross		£ 3,083.33
Tax		
NIC-able additions		£ 1,000.00
NIC-able gross		£ 3,083.33
Employee NIC		£ 289.36
Employer NIC		£ 332.21
Net Pay		£ 2,793.97
Take-home pay		£ 2,793.97
Cost to Employer		£ 3,415.54

The ABC Company - BrightPay 2015/16 (TRIAL - 60 days remaining)

PAYROLL   ANALYSIS   EMPLOYEES   EMPLOYER   HMRC PAYMENTS   RTI   PENSIONS

Month Ending Wednesday, 30 September, 2015

Employee	Gross	PAYE	Employee NIC	Employer NIC	Net	Take-home	Cost to Employer
Anita Smith	£750.00	£0.00	£9.36	£10.21	£740.64	£740.64	£760.21
Joe Bloggs	£3,083.33	£0.00	£289.36	£332.21	£2,793.97	£2,793.97	£3,415.54
Total (2 employees)	£3,833.33	£0.00	£298.72	£342.42	£3,534.61	£3,534.61	£4,175.75

As you build the employees' pay, you can also make additions (e.g. bonus, commission) and deductions due (e.g. attachment orders, payroll giving).

As you amend or add pay details, to the right of the employee screen is a calculation summary of the pay, deductions and payment due for them to take home.

One of the challenges with payroll is when an employee has statutory pay to be calculated. The BrightPay software enables you to click through to a calendar, from the employee screen shown above, and it helps you to create your calculations as part of building the employee pay due. This is really useful and easy to use for sick leave, parenting leave and unpaid leave. You can see the calculations being made and summarised as you click through the dates, selecting the type of leave.

On completion of the employee pay record, click back to the Month Summary screen to proceed to the production of the payslips. At this point, you can also prepare ahead by reviewing the next month, but it will not allow any processing until the previous month has been finalised.

Simply work along the horizontal menu to finalise the payslips and then either print, email or export them. It is very easy to produce the payslips. You can print to blank paper using the BrightPay template or you can print to the compatible stationery used by other payroll software providers. An example of the template for blank paper is below and in my mind sufficient for most requirements. The printing layout can be customised and you can add your own logo.

You then have the option to print or export the pay run summary reports, which includes all the pay information to journal the financial information into your accounts package.

Month Ending Wednesday, 30 September, 2015

The ABC Company · 123/45678

Employee	Gross	PAYE	Employee NIC	Employer NIC	Net	Take-home	Cost to Employer
Anita Smith	£750.00	£0.00	£9.36	£10.21	£740.64	£740.64	£760.21
Joe Bloggs	£3,083.33	£0.00	£289.36	£332.21	£2,793.97	£2,793.97	£3,415.54
Total (2 employees)	£3,833.33	£0.00	£298.72	£342.42	£3,534.61	£3,534.61	£4,175.75

Once the payroll has been completed, you can analyse the pay run by creating or opening a report. The ability to easily review and analyse your payroll data is an integral part of this software product. There are a number of good standard reports, but I like the fact that you can personalise and create your own bespoke reports. When you have a set of reports you rely upon, you can add these to your favourites.

In terms of personalisation, as well as name and surname, you can add other employee details, information for the period or year to date and also breakdown the employer items such as additions or deductions made. This is a really nice feature to make the software really feel like your own.

As the role of the Bookkeeper continues to develop, the ability to analyse and drill down into the financial data for your clients will be an invaluable tool.
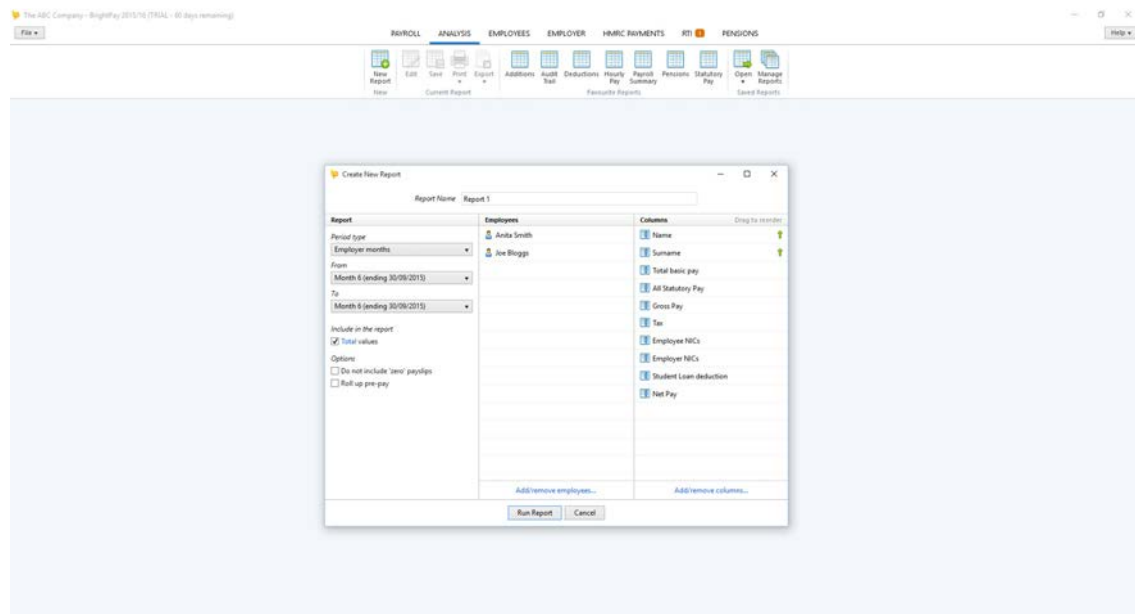
Under the menu tab, HMRC Payments, you can then obtain a copy of the liabilities due to HMRC.

By adding the paid amount and date, the details are carried through to your P32 summary. This all makes the administration requirements of your payroll very easy, as in the past I have been required to have an external Excel document with these details recorded.

On the main menu horizontal bar, you will have a constant reminder if any RTI submission is outstanding. As seen below with the number 1 in red.

The RTI tab provides you with a comprehensive summary of your submission information and a reminder of the submissions due together with the simple 'Send Now' button.

This tab enables you to run the Final Payment Submission (FPS) and the Employer Payment Summary (EPS) as well as some other less than frequent requirements such as the Earlier Year Update.

Within the employees tab, you can view or edit their details, view or print a P11 or related forms, review past payslips, process their automatic enrolment status and adjust their record in relation to attachment orders or coding notices.

The employer tab enables you to change the company settings and has many default recommendations to make this an easy to follow process. From here you can change the employer information, HMRC registration details, add employee defaults and set up the link for online submissions to HMRC.

Auto Enrolment is a hot topic for Payroll providers right now, so I was pleased to see the easy integration within the software and a natural flow for processing. There are many opportunities for bookkeepers to offer a value added service for their clients and this software makes the administration easier for you to manage on the client's behalf.

BrightPay works out when the employees need to be enrolled or communicated with and the procedures are easy to follow / carry out. It provides an ongoing assessment, so the software supports you with your compliance obligations.

The image below shows how BrightPay advised that Anita Smith is a non-eligible jobholder and that she has to be provided with information about her right to opt in. However you can see how the software also provides links to print or export the letter with the approved wording (a snippet is also below) or to take the required action to opt her in, if desired. You can also take other actions to postpone the assessment or mark as exempt, all from this screen.
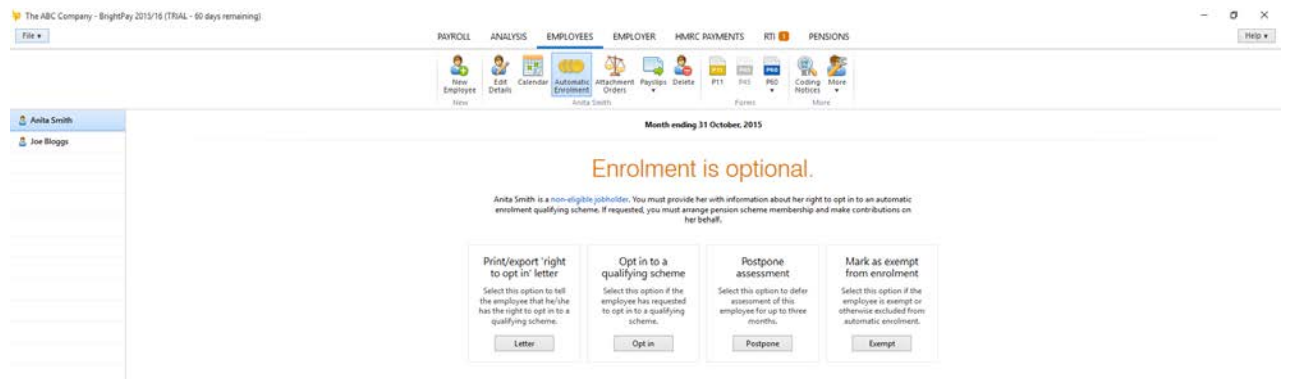
Below is an example of the letter recommended for Anita Smith's circumstances.

Within the software, you can also mark when this letter has been given to her, thereby providing an audit trail of your obligations. If you then try to pay the employee on the next pay run without marking the action as done, you will receive a polite reminder.
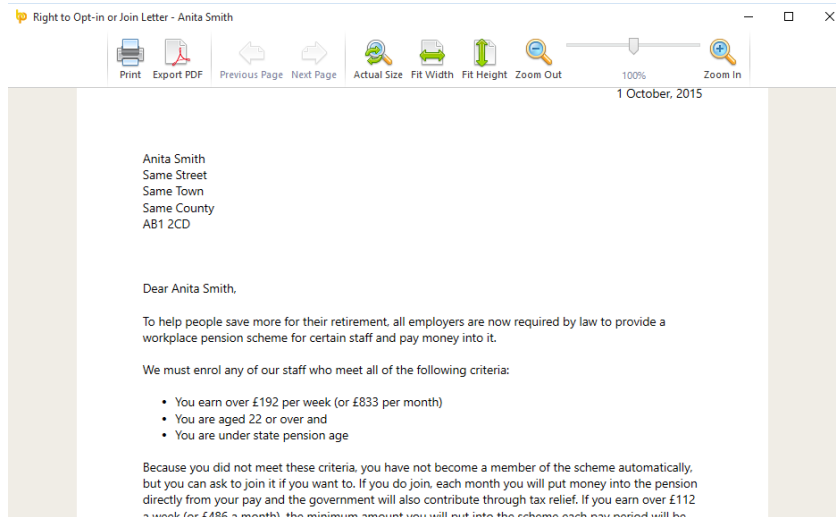
Under the Pensions tab, you can add your Pension scheme details and set the contribution rates for the employer and employee as standard or custom rates.Once an employee opts in or is to be enrolled, you can simply select from a drop down list to choose the relevant scheme/s.

Below is an example of the payslip showing the pension contributions from both the employer and employee.

Joe Bloggs Month Ending 31 Oct 2015   The ABC Company

Employee Details		Payments		Deductions	
National Insurance number		Monthly pay	£2,083.33	Tax	£0.00
National Insurance table	A			National Insurance	£169.36
Tax code	1060L			NEST	£12.78
		Total	£2,083.33	Total	£182.14

Month Ending 31 Oct 2015		Year to Date		Payment
Taxable gross pay	£2,083.33	Taxable gross pay	£5,166.66	
Net pay	£1,913.97	Tax	£0.00	£1,901.19
		Employee National Insurance	£458.72	Paid by Credit Transfer 31/10/15
		Employer National Insurance	£526.42	
		Employee pension	£12.78	
		Employer pension	£15.98	

Employer PAYE Reference: 123/45678   Created with brightpay

The software has built in functionality and dedicated support for many of the pension providers. As of Sept '15 there were 14 named providers such as Nest, Now, Peoples Pension, L&G, Aviva and Scottish Widows, plus other options for many of the traditional pension schemes. Although I did not actually fully process the exporting of a contribution file for uploading to a pension portal, it looks quick and easy, producing an export CSV file for the scheme provider you desire.

There are standard reports under the Analysis / Pensions menu to summarise the contributions calculated. As this is a requirement for the Auto Enrolment records, it was good to see individual reports making the information easy to follow. Again the functionality of customising reports can be really useful here for deeper analysis, such as departmental payroll costs.

Throughout the Auto Enrolment section, there are links to further information as provided by BrightPay or links to the web site of the Pensions Regulator. I found these really helpful and would have saved many minutes of searching for the right answers myself using a search engine.

The screenshot below shows that Joe Bloggs has been enrolled into a qualifying scheme. Thereafter once he is enrolled the options show just those relevant to his circumstances. He can now only opt out or cease.

Enrolled.

Joe Bloggs is enrolled in a qualifying scheme. You must keep making contributions on his behalf. If you receive a valid opt-out notice, you may be required to refund any contributions paid.

Enrolment date	1 October, 2015
Pension scheme provider	NEST
Employer reference	EMP123456789
Group name	Nest Group Pension

Create/send enrolment letter

Select this option to tell the employee that he/she has been enrolled.

[Letter]

Opt out of auto enrolment

Select this option if you or your pension provider receive an opt-out notice.

[Opt out]

Cease active membership

Select this option if the employee wishes to stop pension deductions.

[Cease]

Pricing

Of course, pricing is a sensitive point in the profession, but I like the simplicity of the BrightPay offering with the simple three tiered pricing structure. This is refreshing and there really appears to be no hidden costs (well none that I can find!).

It is a very competitive pricing structure and offers a free entry point for all. For a single company with a maximum of three employees you can obtain a BrightPay license for free and it includes all the features of the product. By offering a business a single user plan with unlimited employees or offering a bureau unlimited employers with unlimited employees, this provides a guaranteed price for the cost budget and no unexpected upgrade fees. It is also pleasing to see free telephone and email support.

I like the confidence that BrightPay show in their own product with a clear 'try before you buy' philosophy.

The introductory paragraphs in this review about BrightPay mention the pricing structure, but please check the web site for the latest prices and offers. Remember it may even be free if not very reasonably priced.

Support

The software support is a key requirement for bookkeepers, who need quick and knowledgeable guidance from people that empathise with their role. So I tested the customer service with two calls. Firstly on the functionality and then another on the combination of payroll knowledge around statutory allowances and the application in the software. The call was answered quickly and I found the BrightPay support friendly and yes very knowledgeable. My queries were answered immediately in a clear, concise and courteous manner with a personal touch. I felt that the two people I spoke with actually had experience of running a payroll rather than just knowing how the software works. I was never made to feel inadequate in my role and found the calls to be a very positive experience.

The support offered by BrightPay by telephone and email is Free and included as part of the annual software subscription, which also of course provides all the latest updates.

Users can also find additional support available from BrightPay in the form of video tutorials and webinars.

For those bookkeepers working in the construction sector, then you will be pleased to know there is a dedicated separate CIS feature titled 'CIS Assistant'. This is a separate product but is free of charge to all BrightPay customers. CIS integration into BrightPay will be available for the 16/17 release. This enables principal contractors to manage and streamline the financial administration of subcontractors.

One last feature that is again a nice addition is the annual leave calculator. This avoids the need for any separate spreadsheets or programmes, but I also like the ability to auto calculate holiday entitlement for the year to date with just the click of a button.

In Summary

As with all payroll software, BrightPay has to meet the HMRC compliance rules, so the user experience is often the key differentiator and I think BrightPay have developed a very nice, useable product that bookkeepers can use with confidence and enjoy the benefits of the pricing structure.

When I first used BrightPay, I was up and running plus comfortable with the product within one hour.

I found BrightPay to be extremely user friendly and deliver everything I needed to run payroll for my business and to meet the requirements of my clients. I was comfortable with the processing of my payroll and really impressed with the functionality. As expected, the way to process the payroll was different to how it was completed in other software, but on this occasion I had no concerns and found the usability intuitive.

To support my review, I also asked a firm of accountants to review the software alongside the payroll software they have used for over ten years and they advised that BrightPay does the same as their current provider and more.

I feel that the software has been written with insight into the user requirements and practical operation. It does everything I need for payroll in next to no time and is easy to follow.

I would perhaps like to have seen the CIS module within the package, but totally understand the reasons for treating this specialist area with an add on. However at this time, this is available to bureaus free of charge (Sept 15). The CIS Assistant product will continue to be available free of charge to BrightPay bureau customers until it is integrated into BrightPay.

The product has been developed with PCs in mind, but I feel that with the growing interest in Apple product, then a MAC version would be useful. A MAC version is in beta at the moment and BrightPay will release it for the 2016/17 tax year if not before.

BrightPay has been accredited by the Institute of Certified Bookkeepers (ICB). The review was conducted by an individual member of ICB who also has experience across a number of payroll products with both an understanding of how payroll works and of the products that other software providers offer.

BrightPay has recently been shortlisted for payroll awards relating to their product and customer service.

Overall I personally like the offering from BrightPay and believe that many other bookkeepers will consider using the software in the near future.

The key points for me, in addition to its features and easy usability were the quality of the customer support, free support, the price point for a bureau licence, the inclusion of the auto enrolment functionality, and the range of webinars or online tutorials available.

I have had the pleasure of personally meeting Director, Paul Byrne and some of his team. At The Bookkeepers Alliance, we like their customer centric values, their ethical approach and what collectively as a team they are striving to deliver. The quote "It's best for our customers and motivates us to create easy to use, problem-free software" says a lot about the approach by BrightPay.

Due to the features and benefits mentioned in my review, then in my opinion, I have no hesitation in awarding a 5 star review for this software. We do not provide 5 star reviews lightly, so as well as my independent review, we took comment from a number of bookkeepers and accountants that have used the product and read a number of online reviews, all of which confirmed my belief that this is a product to take seriously and will continue to grow in the UK market.

BrightPay offers a free version of their software and also a no obligation trial period. See their website for more details.

BrightPay Online Links

Website   www.brightpay.co.uk

Twitter   https://twitter.com/BrightPayUK

YouTube   https://www.youtube.com/user/BrightPay

Review Author

Mike Foster

The Bookkeepers Alliance   www.bookkeepersalliance.co.uk

28th September 2015   Version 1

Disclaimer

The Bookkeepers Alliance has independently reviewed this software and is merely providing an unbiased overview for our members. The Bookkeepers Alliance cannot be held responsible in anyway for the actions of the company or their software and any purchase is solely the decision of the person making that purchase.