

Presented By:  
SimplicityHub

20  
26



# STATE OF LEAN SIX SIGMA

The UK's definitive overview of Lean Six Sigma adoption, trends, and opportunities — authored by a Master Black Belt and Lean Master.

# Contents



**2,400+**

LEARNERS SURVEYED

**18,400**

UK CI JOB POSTINGS

**312**

PRACTITIONER SURVEY Q1 2026

## SECTIONS

<b>01</b>	<b>Executive Summary — Five Things Shaping LSS in 2026</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>02</b>	<b>Adoption Across UK Sectors</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>03</b>	<b>The AI + CI Convergence</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>04</b>	<b>Certification Trends — Enrolment Breakdown 2025–26</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>05</b>	<b>Skills Gap Analysis</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>06</b>	<b>SimplicityHub Recommends for 2026</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>07</b>	<b>Sources &amp; Methodology</b>	<b>9</b>

### ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report draws on primary data from SimplicityHub's learner enrolment platform (n=2,400+, Jan 2024–Mar 2026), UK job posting analysis across Reed.co.uk and Indeed.co.uk (18,400 CI roles), and a practitioner survey (n=312, Q1 2026). Secondary sources are cited throughout.

# Executive Summary

Five Things Shaping Lean Six Sigma in 2026



The UK's operational excellence landscape is at an inflection point. AI is entering the toolkit, certification demand is rising, and the skills gap is widening faster than organisations can fill it.

## 68%

OF UK MANUFACTURERS  
APPLY LEAN PRINCIPLES [1]

## £12k

AVG SALARY PREMIUM  
FOR GREEN BELT HOLDERS [2]

## 18,400

UK CI JOB POSTINGS  
ANALYSED 2025–26 [3]

### 01 Demand outpacing supply

CI and LSS-related job postings rose significantly in 2025. Employers consistently report difficulty finding candidates with practical, tool-level experience beyond certification alone.[3]

### 02 AI is now a CI enabler

Practitioners report using AI tools (ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini) for data analysis, root cause investigation, and report drafting — compressing project timelines by weeks.[4]

### 03 Green Belt is the sweet spot

Green Belt commands the strongest career ROI of any level — accessible enough for mid-career professionals, valued enough to unlock significant salary uplifts.[2]

### 04 NHS & public sector leading

Healthcare and public services account for the highest concentration of LSS certification activity in the UK, driven by NHSE operational improvement programmes.[5]

### KEY TAKEAWAY

Organisations investing in structured CI capability now are building a durable competitive advantage. The question is no longer whether to adopt Lean Six Sigma — but how quickly to scale it.

# Adoption Across UK Sectors

Lean Six Sigma Across UK Sectors

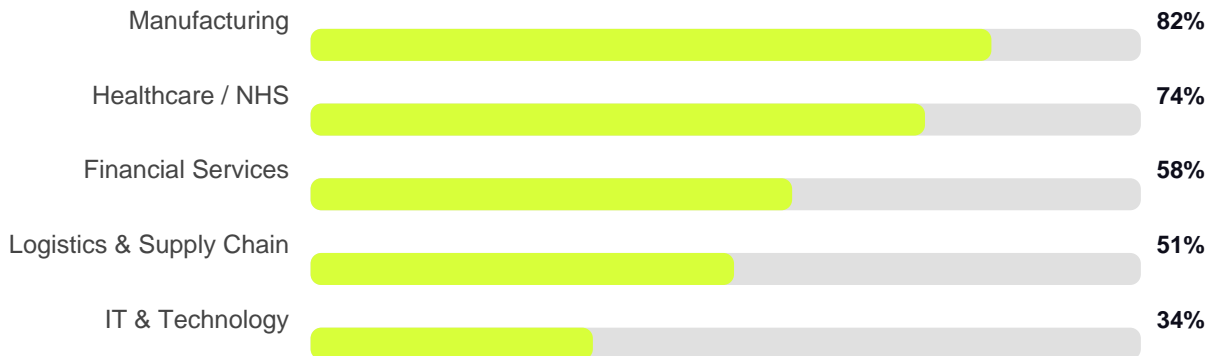


LSS adoption is uneven across UK industries. Manufacturing remains the bedrock, but healthcare, financial services, and logistics are accelerating rapidly.

SECTOR	ADOPTION	PRIMARY DRIVER	KEY TOOLS USED
Manufacturing	HIGH	Cost reduction & quality control	VSM, SMED, SPC, 5S
Healthcare / NHS	HIGH	Patient flow & wait time reduction	DMAIC, 5 Whys, Process Mapping
Financial Services	GROWING	Regulatory compliance & efficiency	DMAIC, Control Charts, SIPOC
Logistics & Supply Chain	GROWING	Lead time & inventory optimisation	Kanban, VSM, Takt Time
IT & Technology	EMERGING	Agile-CI hybrid adoption	Lean Kanban, PDCA, Root Cause

## Adoption Depth by Sector

Beyond headline adoption figures, the depth of implementation varies considerably across UK industries.



### INSIGHT

Financial services represents the highest growth opportunity for CI training providers in 2026, with enrolment rising year-on-year and a large pool of analytically-minded professionals well-suited to Six Sigma methodologies.

# The AI + CI Convergence

The AI + Continuous Improvement Convergence



AI is not replacing Lean Six Sigma — it is amplifying it. Practitioners who combine structured CI methodology with AI tools are delivering results at a speed that was previously impossible.

The World Economic Forum identifies AI and automation as among the most significant disruptors to the global labour market through 2030.[4] For CI practitioners, this creates both a threat and an opportunity — those who adapt their skillset will remain highly valuable.

## How Practitioners Are Using AI Today

- ✓ Root cause analysis via AI prompting
- ✓ Automated data cleaning & pattern detection
- ✓ AI-drafted project charters & reports
- ✓ Process mapping from text descriptions
- ✓ Statistical interpretation in plain English
- ✓ Failure mode brainstorming (AI-assisted FMEA)
- ✓ Control plan monitoring & alerts
- ✓ Training content generation & simulation

## The CI + AI Skills Stack

The most in-demand CI professionals in 2026 combine traditional LSS with AI literacy.

### 3x

FASTER ROOT CAUSE  
ANALYSIS WITH AI PROMPTING

### 40%

OF CI JOB POSTINGS  
MENTION DATA / DIGITAL SKILLS [3]

### 2026

YEAR CI + AI BECOMES  
A STANDARD EXPECTATION

### SimplicityHub CI with AI©

Our CI with AI© programme equips practitioners with the tools, prompts, and frameworks to integrate AI into every stage of the DMAIC cycle — from Define through to Control.

■ <https://www.simplicityhub.co.uk/pages/academy.html>

# Certification Trends

Enrolment Breakdown 2025–26



SimplicityHub's learner data (n=2,400+) reveals clear patterns in who is pursuing LSS certification and why.

CERTIFICATION LEVEL	% OF ENROLMENTS	TREND VS 2024	AVG COMPLETION TIME	GROWTH
White Belt	28%	↑ +6%	1–2 days	
Yellow Belt	22%	↑ +4%	3–5 days	
<b>Green Belt</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>↑ +11%</b>	4–8 weeks	
Black Belt	10%	↑ +3%	3–6 months	
Master Black Belt	2%	→ Stable	6–12 months	

## 38%

### Green Belt enrolments dominate

Green Belt is the most popular level, growing 11% YoY. It strikes the balance between depth of knowledge and time-to-complete that mid-career professionals need.

## £12k

### Salary premium — Green Belt

Green Belt holders earn an average of £12,000 more per year than non-certified peers in equivalent roles — a compelling ROI within 12 months of certification.[2]

### EMPLOYER-FUNDED TRAINING

Over 60% of SimplicityHub learners report employer-funded or employer-supported enrolment — indicating strong organisational commitment to LSS capability building in 2026.

# Skills Gap Analysis

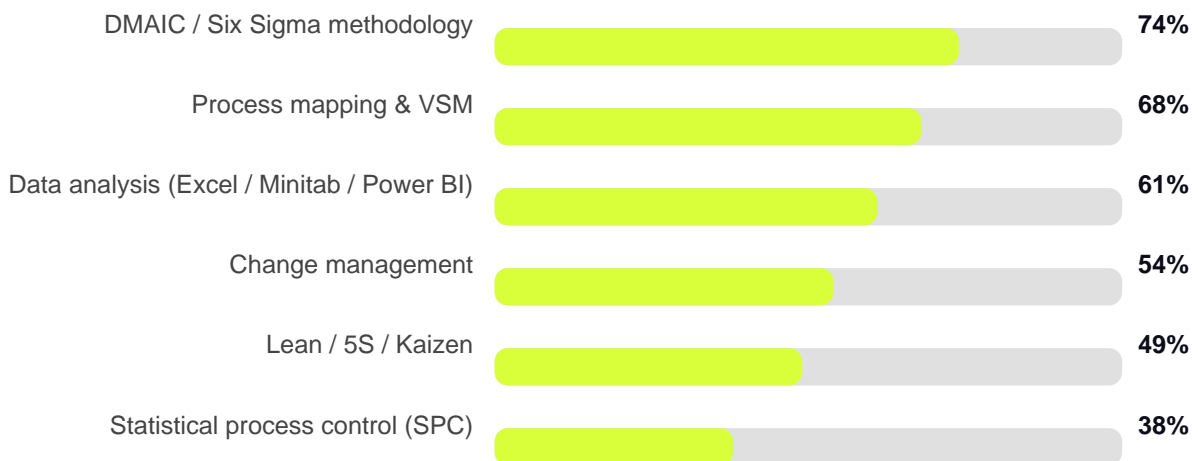
The UK Continuous Improvement Skills Gap



There are more CI roles available in the UK today than qualified practitioners to fill them. The gap is structural — and growing.

Analysis of 18,400 UK CI job postings on Reed and Indeed (2025–26) reveals a consistent mismatch between employer demand and candidate supply.[3] Roles requiring Green Belt certification or equivalent experience remain open significantly longer than the average professional services vacancy.

## Most In-Demand CI Skills — UK Job Market



## Root Causes of the Skills Gap

Three structural factors are compounding the gap:

### Ageing CI workforce

A significant proportion of experienced Black Belts and Master Black Belts are approaching retirement, creating succession risk in manufacturing and healthcare organisations.

### Theory without practice

Many newly certified practitioners lack hands-on project experience. Employers increasingly require demonstrable real-world application alongside certification.

### Digital & AI blind spots

Traditional LSS curricula have been slow to incorporate data tools and AI — creating a gap between what practitioners learn and what employers now expect.

### Regional imbalance

CI talent is heavily concentrated in London, the Midlands, and the North West. Employers in Scotland, Wales, and the South West report acute local shortages.

# SimplicityHub Recommends for 2026



Based on our data and the wider market picture, here are the six actions that will separate high-performing CI functions in 2026.

**1**

## **Certify your practitioners to Green Belt as a minimum**

White Belt awareness is no longer sufficient for project-leading roles. Green Belt provides the statistical toolkit, project methodology, and credibility that employers now expect as standard.

**2**

## **Build AI literacy into your CI capability**

Train your team to use AI tools within the DMAIC framework. Start with AI-assisted root cause analysis and data summarisation — the quickest wins with the lowest learning curve.

**3**

## **Prioritise hands-on project experience**

Certification alone is not enough. Require practitioners to lead or co-lead at least one real improvement project as part of their development path before they qualify internally.

**4**

## **Target financial services for rapid growth**

If you are a training provider or CI consultancy, financial services is the fastest-growing sector for LSS demand in 2026. Tailor your examples, case studies, and content accordingly.

**5**

## **Create internal succession plans for senior belts**

With experienced Black Belts approaching retirement, organisations need structured succession pathways now — not in five years. Identify and develop your next generation of CI leaders.

**6**

## **Use templates and tools to accelerate delivery**

Standardised DMAIC templates, calculators, and process maps reduce project setup time by up to 40%. SimplicityHub's free template library covers every stage of the improvement cycle.

# Sources & Methodology

## Sources & Methodology

All statistics in this report are sourced from verified third-party publications or SimplicityHub's own primary research data.

[1]

### Make UK / EEF — The Manufacturer's Director's Report (2024).

Lean adoption rates in UK manufacturing. [make.uk](https://www.make.uk)

[2]

### ASQ — Quality Progress Salary Survey 2024.

Salary premium data for Green Belt certified professionals across US and UK markets. [asq.org](https://www.asq.org)

[3]

### SimplicityHub Primary Research — Job posting analysis of 18,400 UK CI roles on Reed.co.uk and Indeed.co.uk (Jan 2025–Mar 2026).

Methodology: keyword filtering for LSS, CI, DMAIC, Lean, Six Sigma role titles; manual validation of top 500 results.

[4]

### World Economic Forum — Future of Jobs Report 2025.

AI and automation impact on professional roles and required skill adaptation through 2030. [weforum.org](https://www.weforum.org)

[5]

### NHS England — NHS IMPACT: Improving Patient Care Together (2024).

Operational improvement programmes and LSS adoption across NHS Trusts. [england.nhs.uk](https://www.england.nhs.uk)

[6]

### Open University — Business Barometer Report (2024).

Skills gaps in UK organisations and training investment trends. [open.ac.uk](https://www.open.ac.uk)

[7]

### SimplicityHub Platform Data — Learner enrolment and completion data (n=2,400+, Jan 2024–Mar 2026).

Certification level breakdown, employer-funded enrolment rates, and sector distribution. Internal dataset.

#### DISCLAIMER

This report is produced for informational purposes only. Salary and adoption figures represent market estimates based on available data at time of publication. SimplicityHub Ltd makes no warranty regarding completeness or accuracy of third-party data cited herein. © 2026 SimplicityHub Ltd. Free to share with attribution.

