Imperial College plans its first overseas institution

By Sean Coughlan BBC News education correspondent

Imperial College is going to open a medical school in Singapore, in partnership with a local university.

This will be the first time that the London university has delivered a course overseas.

The medical course, which will accept its first intake in 2013, will teach about 150 students a year.

Financial pressures have restricted the expansion of universities in the UK - but there has been a steady growth in overseas operations.

The medical school in Singapore - which will become the third in the country - will be run jointly by Imperial College London and Nanyang Technological University.

**Funding**

But the funding for setting up the new institution will come from Nanyang Technological University.

Imperial College will receive a fee for its expertise - as well as covering the costs of staff involvement.

The founding dean of the new institution will be Professor Stephen Smith, principal of Imperial's Faculty of Medicine.
The ambition in Singapore is for a medical school teaching a total of 750 students on five year courses.

Doctors training at the new institution will have joint degrees from both universities.

Universities across the UK have faced financial pressures which have restricted their expansion, with tens of thousands of applicants missing out on places this summer.

And there are particular limits on medical schools, with a limit of 7.5% of students coming from overseas.

Opening a department overseas allows more students from outside the UK to be taught by Imperial College.

A spokeswoman for the university says the project in Singapore will raise its global profile - and this will be a way of looking to future opportunities overseas.

"We are extremely proud to be working with Singapore, a country we have long admired for its support and application of world class science, engineering and medicine," said the rector of Imperial College, Sir Keith O'Nions.

"I hope that this agreement will allow us to share new ideas and innovations for teaching medicine and will open the door to a range of collaborations across our disciplines."

This is the latest example of the globalisation of higher education, with UK universities opening departments to meet the growing international demand for university qualifications.

Among the pioneers of this in the UK has been the University of Nottingham, which has campuses in China and Malaysia.

This allows thousands of students in Asia to get a UK degree without having to leave their home country.

This week, the University of Nottingham said that education authorities in Hong Kong had expressed interest in developing such an international university.

Lancaster University has announced a dual degree course with an institution in Pakistan and University College London is planning a department in Australia.