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Tuning Mg²⁺ selectivity: comparative analysis of the photophysical properties of four fluorescent probes with an alkynyl–naphthalene fluorophore

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Abstract: Four alkynyl-1-naphthyl fluorophores have been synthesised with tri- or pentadentate ligating groups suited to the binding of magnesium. Their photophysical and binding properties for magnesium, calcium and zinc ions have been assessed using absorption, emission and excitation spectroscopy. Each compound has a pK_a value between 6.2 and 5.1 and exhibits no significant pH response around pH 7.2. Enhanced selectivity for Mg²⁺ over Ca²⁺ was observed with a pentadentate phosphinate substituted system, compared to its carboxylate analogue, due to a 10-fold lowering of affinity for the Ca²⁺ ion. In each case, the overall dissociation constants for Mg²⁺ fall in the low mM range.

Introduction

Fluorescence spectroscopy is a powerful and extensively used tool in cell biology, because of its high temporal resolution and sensitivity. Design strategies and principles for the creation of fluorogenic sensors have recently been reviewed, highlighting the need to seek systems that combine a long wavelength of excitation with the desired affinity and selectivity profile. ¹ The application of fluorescent sensing is widespread, with a variety of fluorescent sensors providing detailed information on the roles of biologically active cations ²⁻⁵ and anions ⁶ *in vitro* and *in cellulo*. The use of ratiometric probes is highly advantageous, as it allows quantitative information to be obtained independent of environmental factors, such as uneven cell loading or photobleaching. ⁷ Progress in the development of magnesium-selective fluorescent probes, however, has been slow compared to the monitoring of other divalent

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cations, such as Ca²⁺ and Zn²⁺, resulting in a very limited understanding of the specific details of magnesium homeostasis. ^{8a} It is worth noting that progress was made in creating sensitive magnesium selective reagents for use in absorption spectroscopy, based on sulfonated hydroxyl-naphthyl chromophores (λ_{abs} 604 nm) that were able to be used with small volumes of bio-fluids. ^{8b}

Magnesium is the second most abundant divalent cation in cells ⁹ and is directly involved in a number of intracellular processes, playing a fundamental role in over 600 enzymatic reactions ¹⁰ and a key role in the stabilisation of DNA structure.¹¹ The regulation of 'free' magnesium concentrations in cells is essential, with magnesium imbalance such as the onset of hypomagnesaemia linked to a number of cardiovascular ¹², neurodegenerative ^{13,14} and renal ¹⁵ diseases.

The o-aminophenol-N,N,O-triacetic acid (APTRA) ligand developed by London has been used extensively for a variety of metal ion sensing applications. binding the ionisable 'free' magnesium ion with a K_d value in the low mM range.¹⁶⁻²¹ Selectivity is an issue, however, as the APTRA chelates display a much higher affinity towards Ca^{2+} than Mq^{2+} , in every reported case (μM vs mM affinity).¹⁶⁻²¹ The ability of APTRA indicators to act as low affinity calcium-based probes has prevented the accurate determination of 'free' Mg2+ concentrations in areas where Ca2+ concentrations exceed basal levels, such as in serum and in the endo(sarco)plasmic reticulum. The APTRA chelators were first reported over thirty years ago, yet there is still a distinct lack of variety in ligand design for Mg²⁺ sensors. The novelty typically arises from modifications to the chromophore.¹⁸⁻²⁰ Bidentate β-keto acids, for example, have been examined as alternative probes, and exhibit a higher intrinsic selectivity towards Mg²⁺ over Ca²⁺. ²²⁻²⁴ The limitation of these β -keto acids arises from the formation of mixed species in cellulo, with the probes able to bind to both 'free' Mg²⁺ and [MgATP]²⁻. These adducts are indistinguishable by conventional fluorescence spectroscopic studies.²⁵

It is essential that greater effort be placed into the development of new chelate ligand types for the binding of Mg^{2+} , in order to solve this selectivity conundrum. Here, we report the synthesis and analysis of four fluorescent probes containing an alkynyl-naphthalene fluorophore L^1-L^4 (Figure 1). Levy *et al* have previously demonstrated that bi-aryl systems containing an APTRA binding group display a ratiometric response to Mg^{2+} and Ca^{2+} (L^5 , Figure 1). ¹⁷ Following addition of Mg^{2+} , for example, a 30 nm hypsochromic shift in the excitation maximum was reported.¹⁷ The development of two new phosphinate-based fluorescent indicators in

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particular is described, L³ and L⁴, as an alternative to the carboxylate-based APTRA binding chelate used in the literature. Using an alkynyl-naphthalene fluorophore, we have attempted to tune magnesium selectivity by changing the position of the oxygen and nitrogen donor groups on the aromatic framework, incorporating a phosphinate at the expense of a carboxylate group, and by modifying the ligand denticity around the metal ion. The incorporation of the four pro-ligands into an alkynyl-naphthalene fluorophore provided an opportunity to analyse the behaviour of the two new phosphinate-based binding groups via fluorescence spectroscopy. It also enabled the fluorescent systems to act as models for lanthanide(III)-based complexes created in parallel work, to be reported elsewhere, in which pyridylalkynylaryl chromophores are also integrated to sensitise lanthanide(III) emission efficiently. ^{26,27}



Figure 1. Structures of $L^1 - L^4$, compared to L^5 , and (*right*) Mag-Fura-2, after London *et al.*¹⁷

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Ligand L^1 features an APTRA moiety bound to a 1-naphthylalkynyl fluorophore, and L^2 is constitutionally isomeric with L^1 , differing in the position of the oxygen and nitrogen donor atoms around the aromatic ring. Ligand L^3 is a phosphinate analogue of L^1 , containing a pentadentate APDAP binding chelate.²⁸ This ligand has very recently been shown to display a dramatically enhanced selectivity for Mg²⁺, ²⁸ with a 100-fold reduction in the affinity for Ca²⁺ compared to the parent APTRA chelate.²⁹ Unlike the pentadentate ligands L^1-L^3 that form 5-ring chelates, the tridentate ligand L^4 forms a [6,5] chelate around divalent metal ions. It has previously been suggested that such a reduction in ligand denticity may inherently favour the binding of the Mg²⁺ cation over Ca²⁺ and Zn²⁺, as the binding of Ca²⁺ and Zn²⁺ is more enthalpically and entropically driven.²⁹

Thus in this work, direct comparisons will be made across the naphthalene series to determine how the change in the position of the donor atoms, the choice of ligating group, denticity and ring chelate size affect affinity and selectivity for Mg²⁺.

Results and Discussion The synthesis of ligands L^1-L^4 was undertaken using a variety of alkylation and palladium-catalysed cross-coupling reactions. The carboxylate-based ligands, L^1 and L^2 , were synthesised from 2-aminophenol and 2-amino-4-bromophenol respectively, as described in the supplementary information (ESI, Schemes S1 and S2). The synthesis of the phosphinate-based ligands L^3 and L^4 is described in Schemes 1 and 2.

Ligand L^3 was synthesised from the ethyl ester of the parent structure APDAP, **1**, reported recently in a four-step synthesis from 2-nitrophenol ²⁸ (**Scheme 1**). Selective *para*-bromination of **1** was achieved with [K.18-Crown-6]Br₃ in acetonitrile, ³⁰ yielding **2** in high yield under mild conditions. The (triisopropylsilyl)acetylene (TIPS) group was introduced via a Sonogashira crosscoupling reaction, generating **3** in high yield, from which a one-pot alkyne deprotection with tetrabutylammonium fluoride (TBAF) and palladium-catalysed crosscoupling reaction gave rise to the ethyl ester of L^3 . Universal ester hydrolysis under basic conditions formed L^3 , with ligand purity assessed by analytical reverse-phase HPLC.

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Scheme 2 Synthesis of L⁴ from 4-bromo-2-iodoaniline.

The tridentate ligand L^4 was synthesised in five-steps in moderate overall yield (Scheme 2). Alkylation of 4-bromo-2-iodoaniline gave the mono-alkylated intermediate **6** selectively; no traces of *N*,*N*-di-alkylation were found using a range of conventional base and solvent combinations. The palladium-catalysed coupling of ethyl methylphosphinate with **6** was achieved in a procedure adapted from Parker

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and co-workers. ³¹ Compound **7** formed in moderate yield, and was linked to an alkynyl-naphthalene fluorophore in an identical procedure to L^3 (Scheme 1). Originally, it was hoped that *N*,*N*-dialkylation would give rise to the formation of a tetradentate chelating ligand, with two carboxylate and one phosphinate oxygen atoms and an aniline nitrogen atom available to bind to metal ions. *N*,*N*-Di-alkylation was, however, not successful under all conditions attempted, neither from 4-bromo-2-iodoaniline nor from compound **7**, possibly due to steric inhibition of the key substitution reaction caused by the *ortho* iodo or phosphinate substituents.

Photophysical studies of L¹–L⁴

The photophysical properties of L^1-L^4 were examined in aqueous solution at 298K and are summarised in **Table 1**, comparing their behaviour with that of ligand L^5 developed by London.¹⁷ Ligands L^1 , L^3 and L^4 have large Stokes' shifts, in the range of 166 to 204 nm, nearly 30 nm bigger than with L^5 , due to the increase in conjugation and the planarity of the alkynyl-naphthalene chromophore. Such large Stokes' shifts are typically found with organic fluorophores that contain an intramolecular charge transfer (ICT) transition and arise from the stabilisation of the excited state by lone pair conjugation involving the *para* aniline nitrogen atom. The excited state of L^2 in contrast, contains localised π - π^* character, due to the weaker electron donating capabilities of the *para* phenolic oxygen atom. A hypsochromic shift in the absorbance, emission and excitation spectra was observed with a much smaller Stokes' shift of 54 nm (**Table 1**). The excitation wavelengths with $L^{1.3.4}$ allow the use of LEDs that operate at 365 nm, and can be pulsed to minimise the energy absorbed by the system under examination.

Ligand	λ_{abs} / nm, ε /10 ³	Excitation $\lambda_{max}/$ nm ^a		Emission	Ф _{Н2} 0 / %	
	M ⁻¹ cm ⁻¹	'free'	Mg ²⁺ sat.	'free'	Mg ²⁺ sat.	
L ¹	354, 14.1(3)	358	320	562 ^b	522 ^b	0.3 ^c
L ²	318, 13.8(6)	318	318	372	372	1.3 ^d
L ³	350, 10.7(2)	350	336	550	547	0.7 ^c
L^4	341, 12.9(4)	341	341	507	507	0.8 ^c
L ⁵	310, ^e n.d.	325 ^e	295 ^e	499, 358 ^e	499, 358 ^e	n.d.

Table 1. Photophysical data for $L^1 - L^5$ in H₂O at 298 K. Quantum yields (Φ) \pm 20 % measured in H₂O.

^a Measurements recorded in 50 mM HEPES, 100 mM KCl, pH 7.21 at 298 K; ^b $\lambda_{ex} = 354$ nm. Fluorescence quantum yields were measured using either ^c Quinine sulphate (in 0.5 M H₂SO₄) ³² or ^d POPOP ³³ as the standards. ^e Values reported by London ¹⁷, ε and ϕ were not determined (n.d.).

Spectroscopic studies of ligand pK_a with L^1-L^4

For the overwhelming majority of sensors in the literature incorporating an APTRA binding chelate, the pK_a was not determined, owing to putative instability at low pH on prolonged standing in aqueous solution.^{20,29,34} No such problems were encountered in this study, allowing the pH behaviour of L^1-L^4 to be studied via fluorescence spectroscopy. In the case of L^1-L^3 , pK_a values were calculated by fluorescence excitation spectroscopy (ESI). A ratiometric response to pH change was observed in acidic solutions of L^1 (ESI, Figure S1) and L^3 (ESI, Figure S2) following protonation of the aniline N atom, with a non-ratiometric 'turn-on' observed in the excitation spectrum of L^2 (ESI, Figure S3). The pK_a of the tridentate ligand L^4 , was only determined by emission spectroscopy as no pronounced pH sensitivity was seen in its excitation spectrum (ESI, Figure S4).

Calculated p K_a values for L^1-L^4 all fall in the range of 5.2 to 6.2 (**Table 2**), comparable to those reported for Mag-Fura-2, for which a p K_a value of 5.0 was reported by London *et al.*²¹ The fluorescence of each ligand was insensitive to pH from 6.5 to 7.5, indicating that at physiological pH the aniline nitrogen and carboxylate / phosphinate ligating groups are fully de-protonated and available to coordinate to metal ions.^{2,21,35}

Table	2.	The	calc	ulated	р <i>К</i> а	values	of L	¹ –L ⁴	in 1	100	mМ	KCI,	298	Κ,	with	the	error	asso	ciated	to	the
fitting i	in p	aren	nthes	is. The	e p <i>K</i> a	of Mag	-Fura	a-2 is	s pro	vide	ed fo	r com	nparis	son							

Ligand	р <i>К</i> а
L ¹	6.2(04) ^a
L ²	5.7(05) ^a
L ³	5.2(04) ^a
L⁴	5.1(02) ^b
Mag-Fura-2	5.0 ²¹

^{a,b} pK_a values determined by fluorescence excitation / fluorescence emission spectroscopy respectively.

Fluorescence metal ion binding studies with L^1-L^4

Ligand L^1 In the metal-free state, L^1 exhibits an excitation maximum at 358 nm. Following addition of Mg²⁺, Ca²⁺ (**Figure 2**) and Zn²⁺ (**Figure S5**), a ratiometric excitation response was observed, with a pronounced wavelength shift of 38 nm towards the blue (**Table 1**, **Figure 2**). The excitation-based ratiometric behaviour seen here has been reported previously for a number of different cation sensors with Mg²⁺ and Ca²⁺, ^{2,17-21} including Mag-Fura-2, where a 35 nm hypsochromic shift was

observed in the metal-bound state. ²¹ TD-DFT has been used to model the effect of Mg^{2+} binding on the excited state of Mag-Fura-2, revealing that the ICT state is perturbed following Mg^{2+} binding, with elimination of a charge transfer process involving the aniline nitrogen lone pair. The excited state instead possesses localised $\pi-\pi^*$ character in its metal-bound form, resulting in a drastic change in the spectrum on ________ binding. ³⁵



Figure 2. The excitation spectrum of L¹ following addition of (A) Mg²⁺ and (B) Ca²⁺, $\lambda_{em} = 530$ nm, K_d values were calculated from a 1:1 stoichiometry from the ratio of the intensity of the metal-free and bound states against the concentration of (C) Mg²⁺ and (D) Ca²⁺, and are reported as an average of two separate metal ion titrations, given with the experimental error in parenthesis. Ligand conc. = 5 μ M in 50 mM HEPES, 100 mM KCl, pH 7.21, 298 K.

Dissociation constants of 4.5(2) mM and 39.6(5) μ M were calculated following addition of Mg²⁺ and Ca²⁺ respectively (**Table 3**), consistent with typical affinities observed for APTRA analogues in the literature.¹⁷⁻²¹ Comparable values were calculated from fluorescence emission spectral changes, with excitation at both the isosbestic point and the wavelength maximum in the absorption spectrum (**ESI**). Following excitation at the isosbestic point (λ_{ex} = 330 nm), 'turn-on' emission ratiometric behaviour was observed (**ESI**, **Figure S6**).

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Ligand L^2 In contrast to the excitation- and emission-based ratiometric behaviour reported for L^1 , a non-ratiometric 'turn-on' response was found with L^2 following addition of Mg²⁺, Ca²⁺ and Zn²⁺. Wavelength maxima of 318 nm and 372 nm were observed in excitation and emission spectra respectively. A 3-, 6- and 9-fold intensity enhancement was found following addition of Mg²⁺, Ca²⁺ (**Figure 3**) and Zn² (**ESI**, **Figure S7**), owing to the suppression of a photo-induced electron transfer (PET) process. No hypsochromic shift was observed following metal ion binding, as the excited state of L^2 has localised π - π^* character in both its 'free' and 'metal-bound' forms.



Figure 3. The excitation spectrum of L^2 following addition of (A) Mg²⁺ and (B) Ca²⁺, $\lambda_{em} = 377$ nm. K_d values were calculated from a 1:1 stoichiometry from the intensity at 318 nm against the concentration of (C) Mg²⁺ and (D) Ca²⁺, and are reported as an average of two separate metal ion titrations, given with the experimental error in parenthesis. Ligand conc. = 10 μ M in 50 mM HEPES, 100 mM KCl, pH 7.21, 298 K.

Calculated dissociation constants for the binding of L^2 are comparable to those measured for L^1 . Values of 1.3(8) mM, 32.7(4) μ M and 3.2(2) μ M were recorded for the binding of Mg²⁺, Ca²⁺ (**Figure 3**) and Zn²⁺ (**ESI**, **Figure S7**) respectively. The slightly enhanced affinity observed for the binding of L^2 to Mg²⁺ and Ca²⁺ may arise from the increased donor ability of the *meta* aniline nitrogen atom.

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It is evident that despite changing the relative position of the nitrogen and oxygen atoms on the APTRA binding framework, comparable affinity and selectivities for Mg²⁺, Ca²⁺ and Zn²⁺ are found (**Table 3**). However, changing the position of the donor groups does have a significant effect on the excitation and emission spectral response. Both L¹ and L² have dissociation constants in the low mM range following addition of Mg²⁺, aligning with the concentrations of 'free' Mg²⁺ in mammalian cells (0.8-1.5 mM), ⁹ and with the affinity and selectivity of alternative APTRA-based sensors reported previously.¹⁷⁻²¹ In accordance with literature precedent, ligands L¹ and L² also displayed a higher affinity for Ca²⁺, responding in the mid- μ M range. Such an affinity profile is undesirable for Mg²⁺ sensing applications.³⁶

*Ligand L*³ The pentadentate APDAP binding chelate was recently developed as an alternative chelating ligand to APTRA. From initial absorbance spectroscopy studies, it was found to display an enhanced selectivity for Mg^{2+} , binding Ca^{2+} in the low mM range.²⁸ Described here is the first example of incorporation of the APDAP chelate into a fluorescence system to analyse the binding of Mg^{2+} , Ca^{2+} and Zn^{2+} .

Unlike its carboxylate analogue L^1 , ligand L^3 showed no significant ratiometric behaviour in its absorption or excitation spectra following addition of Mg²⁺ (**ESI**, **Figure S8**). A hypsochromic shift was, however, observed in acidic solution (e.g. at pH 4), suggesting that the aniline nitrogen atom may not have a prominent role in binding to Mg²⁺. The small changes observed in excitation intensity on addition of Mg²⁺ meant it was not feasible to generate dissociation constants accurately via this method. Instead, K_d values were calculated from fluorescence emission spectral changes. Following excitation at 350 nm, a wavelength maximum of 545 nm was displayed in the 'metal-free' state, with an 18 nm shift to lower wavelengths and a 1.5-fold reduction in the emission intensity on saturation with Mg²⁺ (**8.5** mM) (**Figure 4**). Following addition of Ca²⁺ (**Figure 4**) and Zn²⁺ (**ESI**, **Figure S9**), however, an excitation shift was observed that could be followed ratiometrically, with a 31 nm hypsochromic shift in the metal-bound state. Such behaviour implies that the aniline nitrogen atom binds more strongly to Ca²⁺ and Zn²⁺ than to Mg²⁺.



Figure 4. The emission spectrum of L^3 following addition of (A) Mg²⁺ ($\lambda_{ex} = 350$ nm) and the excitation spectrum following addition of (B) Ca²⁺ ($\lambda_{em} = 530$ nm). K_d values were calculated from a 1:1 stoichiometry from the intensity plotted against the concentration of (C) Mg²⁺ and (D) Ca²⁺, and are reported as an average of three separate metal ion titrations, given with the experimental error in parenthesis. Ligand conc. = 10 μ M in 50 mM HEPES, 100 mM KCl, pH 7.21, 298 K.

Dissociation constants of 0.5(2) mM, 0.4(1) mM and 3.3(3) μ M were calculated respectively, assuming a 1:1 stoichiometry between Mg²⁺, Ca²⁺ and Zn²⁺ ions (**Table 3**). The ligand L³ displays increased selectivity for Mg²⁺ compared to the carboxylate analogues L¹ and L². A 10-fold reduction in affinity for Ca²⁺ was found, with a K_d value in the low mM range. It is likely that the increased selectivity is due to the less acute bite angles (9°) around Mg²⁺ in the phosphinate chelate, as predicted from detailed DFT studies of both [Mg(APTRA)H₂O]⁻ and [Mg(APDAP)H₂O]⁻. ²⁸ It is both interesting and surprising to note that L³ has a higher affinity for Mg²⁺ than either L¹ or L². Its affinity falls in the desired affinity range, close to the concentration of 'free' Mg²⁺ in mammalian cells.

Ligand L^4 The tridentate ligand L^4 , displayed a non-ratiometric response in both its emission and excitation spectrum, following addition of Mg²⁺, Ca²⁺ and Zn²⁺. In the emission spectrum, a wavelength maximum of 499 nm was found, following excitation at 347 nm. Small spectral changes were observed after addition of high

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concentrations of Mg²⁺ (160 mM), Ca²⁺ (2 mM) (**Figure 5**) and Zn²⁺ (56 μ M) (**ESI**, **Figure S10**). A *K*_d value of 16.5(6.6) mM was calculated for the binding of Mg²⁺ (**ESI**, **Figure S11**), with the large error associated with fitting small fluorescence intensity changes. Dissociation constants could not reliably be calculated for Ca²⁺ or Zn²⁺, and weak binding affinity is presumed.



Figure 5. Emission spectra of L¹ following addition of (A) Mg²⁺ (160 mM) and (B) Ca²⁺ (2 mM) (λ_{ex} = 347 nm). Excitation spectra following addition of (C) Mg²⁺ and (D) Ca²⁺ (λ_{em} = 501 nm). Ligand concentration = 5 μ M in 50 mM HEPES, 100 mM, pH 7.2, KCI, 298K.

It has previously been suggested by Buccella and co-workers that reducing the ligand denticity should favour the binding of Mg^{2+} , as its binding is less enthalpically and entropically driven than Ca^{2+} and Zn^{2+} . ²⁹ In this instance, however, it is apparent that by reducing the number of ligating groups, 4-fold weaker binding is observed for Mg^{2+} compared to that with the pentadentate ligand L^1 . The non-ratiometric response and the small intensity changes in the fluorescent emission and excitation spectra following addition of Mg^{2+} , Ca^{2+} and Zn^{2+} make the tridentate L^4 system unsuitable for the accurate determination of the concentrations of metal ions.

Ligand	<i>K</i> d (Mg ²⁺) / mM	<i>K</i> _d (Ca ²⁺) / μΜ	<i>K</i> _d (Zn ²⁺) / μM
L ¹	4.5(2)	39.6(4.9)	1.7(1)
L ²	1.3(8)	32.7(3.7)	3.2(2)
L ³	0.5(2)	400(10)	3.3(3)
L ⁴	16.5(6.6)	‡	‡
L ⁵	1.8 ¹⁷	17 ¹⁷	n.d.

Table 3. The calculated dissociation constants for $L^1 - L^5$ (50 mM HEPES, 100 mM KCl, pH 7.2, 298 K).

⁺ No dissociation constants were determined from the Ca²⁺ and Zn²⁺ fluorescence titrations due to the absence of significant spectral change. Corresponding K_d values for Mag-Fura-2 are 1.9 mM (Mg²⁺), 25 μ M(Ca²⁺), 20 nM (Zn²⁺).

Fluorescence binding studies using L³ in competitive media

It is thought that 'free' Mg²⁺ concentrations are maintained within the narrow range of 0.7-1.1 mM in the blood plasma, comparable to the concentration of 'free' Mg²⁺ within the majority of mammalian cells.³⁷ Concentrations of 'free' Mg²⁺ in human serum are often not determined due to the lack of techniques to detect 'free' Mg²⁺ ions selectively. ⁸ The APTRA fluorescent indicators, e.g. Mag-Fura-2, are unsuitable for this task, due to elevated Ca²⁺ concentrations of around 1.1 mM in human serum. ³¹

The APDAP-based ligand L^3 possesses many characteristics that render it potentially suitable to detect 'free' Mg²⁺ in human serum. It has no pH interference in the physiological range (pH 6.5-7.5) and exhibits a low mM binding affinity for Ca²⁺ (K_d = 0.4 mM). The binding of Mg²⁺ to L^3 was analysed in a buffered 'competitive medium' containing 50 mM HEPES and concentrations of Na⁺ (140 mM), K⁺ (4 mM) and Ca²⁺ (1.1 mM) in accordance with the mean values found in human serum. ³⁸ These competitive binding studies were designed to provide an initial indication into how the affinity for Mg²⁺ was affected following competitive cation binding, simulating whether the APDAP chelate would respond to Mg²⁺ fluxes in human serum. A 26 nm hypsochromic shift in the absorbance wavelength maximum was observed, characteristic of partial saturation due to Ca²⁺ binding (**Figure S12**). A wavelength maximum of 545 nm was measured, following excitation at 350 nm, and a 1.6-fold 'turn-off' response was found following addition of 3.5 mM Mg²⁺, (**Figure 6**).

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Figure 6. (A) Emission spectra of L³ following addition of Mg²⁺ (3.5 mM). **(B)** Fitting of the emission intensity at 545 nm against the concentration of Mg²⁺ via a 1:1 binding model. (λ_{ex} = 350 nm). Ligand concentration = 10 μ M in 50 mM HEPES, 140 mM NaCl, 4 mM KCl, 1.1 mM CaCl₂, pH 7.2, 298K.

A dissociation constant of 0.11(1) mM was calculated for the binding of Mg^{2+} in the buffered medium. Such a significant reduction in apparent affinity was expected due to the presence of 1.1 mM CaCl₂ that creates a mixture of unbound and calcium-bound probe in solution, prior to any addition of Mg^{2+} . Nevertheless, this behaviour demonstrates that L^3 can monitor variations in 'free' Mg^{2+} ions in a more complex medium where concentrations of Ca²⁺ are above basal levels. Such an approach is not possible with the APTRA-based sensors, because of the μ M binding affinity displayed for Ca²⁺.

Summary and Conclusions

Following the synthesis of four alkynyl-1-naphthalene fluorophores (L^1-L^4) of differing ligand denticity, we have demonstrated that it is possible to tune Mg²⁺ / Ca²⁺ selectivity. Each ligand possesses a p*K*_a value in the range 5.1 to 6.2, comparable to that of the commercial probe, Mag-Fura-2. The APTRA analogues, L^1 and L^2 , were found to have comparable affinities for both Mg²⁺ and Ca²⁺ in the low mM and mid- μ M range respectively, supporting literature precedent. Changing the position of the nitrogen and oxygen donor groups, relative to the naphthalene fluorophore, gave rise to significant differences in the absorbance, emission and excitation spectral response to divalent cations. Ligand L^1 displayed a ratiometric response, due to the elimination of the ICT band on protonation and metal ion binding, while a non-ratiometric 'turn-on' response was found for L^2 .

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By incorporating a phosphinate group into the ligand framework at the expense of a carboxylate group, enhanced Mg^{2+} / Ca^{2+} binding selectivity is created. The APDAP-based ligand, L^3 , displayed an order of magnitude reduction in affinity for Ca^{2+} , compared to L^1 and L^2 with a K_d value of 0.4(1) mM. Such affinity allowed the binding of Mg^{2+} to be investigated in a 'competitive medium', highlighting that L^3 can be used to monitor variations in 'free' Mg^{2+} concentrations in solutions where Ca^{2+} ions are present above basal levels. In the alkynyl-1-naphthyl systems studied, the pentadentate binding chelates are preferred in order to match the desired low mM affinity for Mg^{2+} binding. Reducing the ligand denticity lowered the affinity for Mg^{2+} ; the tridentate ligand L^4 displayed a 4-fold weaker binding with respect to L^1 .

This comparative study highlights the advantages of using new ligand types incorporating phosphinate donors in order to significantly change metal ion selectivity. Further work is underway to exploit the differing selectivity profiles of such systems, with different types of signal transduction, seeking systems combining a ratiometric read-out and a longer a wavelength of excitation with the desired magnesium selectivity profile.¹

Experimental

General procedures

All commercially available reagents were used as received from suppliers, without further purification. All moisture sensitive reactions were carried out under Schlenk-line techniques. The ethyl ester of APDAP, **1**, was synthesised according to our previous work.²⁸ Thin-layer and column chromatography was performed on silica (Merck Art 5554) and visualised under UV irradiation (254 nm). Routine ¹H (400 MHz) and ¹³C (101 MHz) and ³¹P (162 MHz) NMR spectra were acquired on Varian Mercury 400 NMR spectrometers. ¹³C NMR and ³¹P NMR spectra were run with proton decoupling. Two-dimensional NMR spectra (COSY, HSQC and HSBC) were run on Varian-600 (600 MHz) or VNMRS-700 (700 MHz) instruments. ES-MS data was acquired on a Waters TQD mass spectrometer interfaced with an Acquity UPLC system. Mass spectra of L¹–L⁴ were recorded on a Waters Xevo QToF instrument in an acetonitrile and ammonium bicarbonate buffered (25 mM) system.

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pK_a Determination

pH measurements were recorded using a Jenway 3510 pH meter in combination with a Jenway 924 005 pH electrode. The pH probe was calibrated before each independent titration using buffer solutions of pH 4, 7 and 10. Samples were prepared with a background of constant ionic strength (I = 0.1 M KCl, 298 K), and titrated to acid. The resulting sigmoidal curve of fluorescence intensity vs. pH was fitted by a non-linear least squares iterative analysis in Boltzmann using Origin 8.0 software. p K_a values were calculated with an error associated with the fitting.

Metal ion binding studies

All divalent metal binding studies for the addition of Mg²⁺, Ca²⁺ and Zn²⁺ ([M²⁺]) were carried out in buffered solutions of 50 mM HEPES and 100 mM KCI maintained at pH 7.2. All titrations were run in aqueous solution, with water purified by the 'Purite_{STILL}plus' system with a conductivity of $\leq 0.04 \ \mu$ S cm⁻¹. Stock solutions of [M²⁺] were prepared containing the same concentration of the sensor used in the titration to avoid sample dilution. Absorbance, emission and excitation spectra were run 5 min after the addition of small aliquots of [M²⁺] to ensure the sample had fully equilibrated. Dissociation constants (K_d values) for the binding of Mg²⁺ and Ca²⁺ were generated from a 1:1 binding model obtained from a least square fitting iterative from *www.supramolecular.org.* In the case of Zn²⁺ binding, K_d 's were calculated from a 1:1 binding model from **S3** and **Equation S4** (See **ESI** for more information). Errors associated with the K_d values were generated from two or more repetitions of the binding experiments.

Ligand synthesis

Diethyl 2,2'-((4-bromo-2-((ethoxy(methyl) phosphoryl)methoxy) phenyl) azanediyl)diacetate, (2)



[K.18-crown-6]Br₃ (132.3 mg, 0.24 mmol) was added to a solution of (1) (82.5 mg, 0.21 mmol) in anhydrous acetonitrile (1.2 mL). The reaction was stirred at room temperature for 1 h under an inert atmosphere of argon. Reaction completion

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was confirmed via ESI mass spectrometry. The solution was diluted with ethyl acetate (10 mL) before being washed with water (10 mL) and dried over MgSO₄. The solvent was removed under reduced pressure to form a dark yellow / brown oil. Purification by silica gel column chromatography (gradient 100 % hexane to 100 % ethyl acetate) formed the title compound as a colourless oil. (101 mg, 82 %). ¹H NMR (700 MHz, CDCl₃) 7.05 (1 H, dd, *J* 9, 2, H⁴), 7.00 (1 H, d, *J* 2, H⁶), 6.81 (1 H, d, *J* 9, H³), 4.28 – 4.06 (12 H, m, H⁷, H⁹, H¹¹, H¹³), 1.64 (3 H, d, *J* 15, H⁸), 1.33 (3 H, t, *J* 7, H¹⁰), 1.23 (6 H, t, *J* 7, H¹⁴); ³¹P NMR (283 MHz, CDCl₃) + 47.2; ¹³C NMR (176 MHz, CDCl₃) 170.6 (s, C¹²), 151.4 (d, *J* 12, C¹), 138.6 (s, C²), 125.5 (s, C⁴), 122.0 (s, C³), 117.7 (s, C⁶), 114.7 (s, C⁵), 65.1 (d, *J* 110, C⁷), 61.0 (d, *J* 7, C⁹), 60.8 (s, C¹¹ or C¹³), 53.2 (s, C¹¹ or C¹³), 16.5 (d, *J* 6, C¹⁰), 14.1 (s, C¹⁴), 12.5 (d, *J* 98, C⁸); ESI-LRMS [C₁₈H₂₈⁷⁹BrNO₇P]⁺ (+) *m/z* 480.1; ESI-HRMS calcd for [C₁₈H₂₈⁷⁹BrNO₇P]⁺ 480.0787 found 480.0778.

Ethyl 2-({2-[(dimethyl phosphoryl)methoxy]-4-{2-[tris(propan-2-yl)silyl]ethynyl} phenyl}(2-ethoxy-2-oxoethyl)amino)acetate, (3)



Compound (2) (273.9 mg, 0.57 mmol) was dissolved in anhydrous THF (1.8 mL) and the solution was degassed via three freeze-pump-thaw cycles. (Triisopropylsilyl)acetylene (0.64 mL, 2.85 mmol), triethylamine (0.56 mL, 4.02 mmol), Pd(dppf)Cl₂ (56.7 mg, 0.08 mmol) and copper iodide (22.0 mg, 0.1 mmol) were added, and the solution was degassed via a further three freeze-pump-thaw cycles. The solution was stirred at 65 °C for 6 d under an inert atmosphere of argon, reaction completion being determined by ESI mass spectrometry. The solvent was removed under reduced pressure to form a dark brown residue. Purification by silica gel column chromatography (gradient 100 % CH₂Cl₂ to 95 % CH₂Cl₂ / 5 % MeOH) formed the title compound as a pale brown oil (270.9 mg, 86 %). R_f (silica, 95 % CH₂Cl₂ / 5 % MeOH) = 0.54; ¹H NMR (600 MHz, CDCl₃) 7.08 (1 H, dd, *J* 9, 2, H⁴), 6.97 (1 H, d, *J* 2, H⁶), 6.81 (1 H, d, *J* 9, H³), 4.31 –

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4.07 (12 H, m, H⁷, H⁹, H¹¹ and H¹³), 1.65 (3 H, d, *J* 15, H⁸), 1.36 (3 H, t, *J* 7, H¹⁰), 1.25 (6 H, t, *J* 7, H¹⁴), 1.13 (3 H, br m, H¹⁷), 1.11 (18 H, s, H¹⁸); ³¹P NMR (243 MHz, CDCl₃) + 47.5; ¹³C NMR (151 MHz, CDCl₃) 170.7 (s, C¹²), 149.9 (s, C¹), 139.8 (s, C²), 126.8 (s, C⁴), 119.9 (s, C³), 117.5 (s, C⁶), 117.4 (s, C⁵), 106.6 (s, C¹⁵), 89.8 (s, C¹⁶), 65.3 (d, *J* 111, C⁷), 60.9 (d, *J* 7, C⁹), 60.8 (s, C¹¹ or C¹³), 53.3 (s, C¹¹ or C¹³), 18.7 (s, C¹⁸), 16.5 (d, *J* 6, C¹⁰), 14.2 (s, C¹⁴), 12.6 (d, *J* 98, C⁸) 11.3 (s, C¹⁷); ESI-LRMS [C₂₉H₄₉NO₇PSi]⁺ (+) *m/z* 582.3; ESI-HRMS calcd for [C₂₉H₄₉NO₇PSi]⁺ 582.3007 found 582.3016.

Diethyl 2,2'-((2-((ethoxy(methyl)phosphoryl)methoxy)-4-(naphthalen-1ylethynyl)phenyl)azanediyl)diacetate, (4)



Compound (3) (252.5 mg, 0.434 mmol) and 1-bromonaphthalene (58 µL, 0.41 mmol) were dissolved in anhydrous THF (1.8 mL) and the solution was degassed by three freeze-pump-thaw cycles. Triethylamine (1.2 mL), Pd(dppf)Cl₂ (43.9 mg, 0.06 mmol) and copper iodide (61.2 mg, 0.32 mmol) were then added and the solution was degassed once more. Tetrabutylammonium fluoride (TBAF, 1 M solution in THF, 0.6 mL, 0.6 mmol) was then added before the brown solution was degassed with three final freeze-pump-thaw cycles. The reaction mixture was stirred at 65 °C for 19 h under an inert atmosphere of argon, before the solvent was removed under reduced pressure to form a dark brown / black residue. Purification by column chromatography (gradient 100 % hexane to 100 % ethyl acetate) formed the title compound as a pale brown oil (24.1 mg, 10 %). ¹H NMR (700 MHz, CDCl₃) 8.39 (1 H, d, J 8, H^{20'}), 7.85 (1 H, d, J 9, H^{17'}), 7.82 (1 H, d, J 8, H²⁰), 7.72 (1 H, dd, J 7, 2, H¹⁸), 7.60 – 7.57 (1 H, m, H^{19'}), 7.53 – 7.51 (1 H, m, H^{18'}), 7.46 – 7.43 (1 H, m, H¹⁹), 7.25 (1 H, dd, J 6, 2, H⁵), 7.15 (1 H, d, J 2, H³), 6.90 (1 H, d, J 8, H⁶), 4.36 – 4.09 (14 H, m, H⁷, H⁹, H¹¹ and H¹³), 1.68 (3 H, d, J 15, H⁸), 1.37 (3 H, t, J 7, H¹⁰), 1.26 (6 H, t, J 7, H¹⁴); ³¹P NMR (101 MHz, CDCl₃) + 53.8; ¹³C NMR (176 MHz, CDCl₃) 170.7 (s, C¹²), 150.1 (s, C²), 139.8 (s, C¹), 133.2 (s, C¹⁷), 130.2 (s, C¹⁸), 128.3 (s, C¹⁷), 128.6 (s,

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C²⁰), 126.7 (s, C^{19'}) 126.5 (s, C⁵), 126.4 (s, C^{21'}), 126.3 (s, C^{20'}), 126.2 (s, C^{18'}), 125.3 (s, C¹⁹), 120.9 (s, C²¹), 120.0 (s, C⁶) 117.1 (d, *J* 7, C³) 94.0 (s, C¹⁵), 87.0 (s, C¹⁶), 64.6 (s, C⁷, C⁹, C¹¹ or H¹³), 65.2 (s, C⁷, C⁹, C¹¹ or H¹³), 60.9 (s, C⁷, C⁹, C¹¹ or H¹³), 53.3 (s, C⁷, C⁹, C¹¹ or H¹³), 16.6 (s, C¹⁰), 14.2 (s, C¹⁴), 12.6 (d, *J* 97, C⁸); ESI-LRMS [C₃₀H₃₅NO₇P]⁺ (+) *m/z* 552.1; ESI-HRMS calcd for [C₃₀H₃₅NO₇P]⁺ 552.2153 found 552.2151.

2,2'-((2-((Hydroxy(methyl)phosphoryl)methoxy)-4-(naphthalen-1-ylethynyl) phenyl)azanediyl)diacetic acid, L³



The ethyl ester of L^3 (4) (11 mg, 0.02 mmol) was dissolved in CD₃OD (2 mL) containing NaOD (0.4 M in D₂O, 0.5 mL). The pale yellow solution was stirred under argon at room temperature for 48 h. Ester hydrolysis was confirmed by ¹H NMR spectrometry and ESI-LRMS. The solution was lyophilised to form the title compound as a pale brown solid in quantitative conversion (7 mg). QToF-LRMS [C₂₄H₂₁NO₇P]⁻ (-) *m/z* 466.1; ESI-HRMS calcd for [C₂₄H₂₁NO₇P]⁻ (-) 466.1056 found 466.1044. Reverse phase HPLC (0 % - 100 % - 0% CH₃CN in ammonium bicarbonate buffer (25 mM) *t*_R = 7.1 min; ϕ_{H_2O} = 0.7 %.

Ethyl 2-((4-bromo-2-iodophenyl)amino)acetate, (6)



N,N-Diisopropylethylamine (0.96 g, 1.3 mL, 7.50 mmol) and ethyl bromoacetate (600 μ L, 5.40 mmol) were added to a solution of 4-bromo-2-iodoaniline (641.4 mg, 2.15 mmol) and sodium iodide (130.2 mg, 2.87 mmol) in anhydrous acetonitrile (3.8 mL). The reaction was heated at 85 °C for 24 h under an inert

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atmosphere of nitrogen, before additional *N*,*N*-diisopropylethylamine (1.2 mL, 6.89 mmol) and ethyl bromoacetate (470µL, 4.24 mmol) were added. The reaction mixture was stirred for a further 40 h at 85 °C. After cooling to room temperature the brown reaction mixture was diluted with ethyl acetate (15 mL), filtered through celite, and washed with water (10 mL) and brine (10 mL). Organic extracts were combined and dried over MgSO₄, and the solvent was removed under reduced pressure to form a brown residue. Purification by silica gel column chromatography (gradient 100 % hexane to 80 % hexane / 20 % ethyl acetate) formed the title compound as an off-white solid (565 mg, 68 %). R_f (80 % hexane / 20 % ethyl acetate) = 0.72; m.p. 77 - 78 °C; ¹H (700 MHz, CDCl₃) 7.77 (1 H, d, *J* 2, H³), 7.29 (1 H, dd, *J* 9, 2, H⁵), 6.29 (1 H, d, *J* 9, H⁶), 4.86 (1 H, br t, *J* 5, -NH), 4.26 (2 H, q, *J* 7, H⁹), 3.89 (2 H, d, *J* 5, H⁷), 1.30 (3 H, t, *J* 7, H¹⁰); ¹³C (176 MHz, CDCl₃) 170.0 (C⁸), 145.4 (C¹), 140.6 (C³), 132.1 (C⁵), 111.4 (C⁴), 109.6 (C⁶), 85.3 (C²), 61.6 (C⁷), 46.0 (C⁹), 14.1 (C¹⁰); ESI-LRMS [C₁₀H₁₁NI⁷⁹Br]⁺ (+) *m/z* 384.1; ESI-HRMS calcd for [C₁₀H₁₁NI⁷⁹Br]⁺ 383.9096 found, 383.9099.

Ethyl 2-((4-bromo-2-(ethoxy(methyl)phosphoryl)phenyl)amino) acetate, (7)



Ethyl 2-((4-bromo-2-iodophenyl)amino)acetate, (**6**) (390.2 mg, 1.02 mmol), ethyl methyl phosphinate (as its EtOH adduct, 200.8 mg, 1.30 mmol) and triethylamine (0.58 mL, 4.16 mmol) were added to dry toluene (degassed by three freeze-pump-thaw cycles). The solution was degassed by a further three cycles before the addition of Pd(dppf)Cl₂.CH₂Cl₂ (19.2 mg, 0.024 mmol). The reaction mixture was stirred at 118 °C under an inert atmosphere of argon for 22 h. After cooling to room temperature the solvent was removed under reduced pressure to form a dark brown residue. Purification by silica gel column chromatography (gradient 100 % hexane to 1:1 ethyl acetate / hexane) formed the title compound as a yellow oil (137 mg, 39 %). R_f (silica, 1:1 ethyl acetate / hexane) = 0.52; ¹H (600 MHz, CDCl₃) 7.50 (1 H, br s, NH), 7.43 (1 H, dd, *J* 12, 2, H³), 7.38 (1 H, dd, *J* 8, 2, H⁵), 6.38 (1 H, dd, *J* 8, 6, H⁶), 4.21 (2 H, q, *J* 7, H⁹), 4.13 (2 H, m, H¹²), 3.89 (2 H, br s, H⁷), 1.66 (3 H, t, *J* 15, H¹¹), 1.32 (3 H, t, *J* 7, H¹³), 1.25 (3 H, t, *J* 8, H¹⁰); ¹³C (151 MHz, CDCl₃) 170.1 (s, C⁸), 150.1 (d, *J* 7, C¹), 136.5 (d, *J* 2, C⁵), 134.8 (d, *J* 10, C³),

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114.1 (d, *J* 122, C²), 113.7 (s, C), 112.9 (d, *J* 10, C⁶), 108.0 (d, *J* 15, C⁴), 61.3 (s, C⁹), 60.9 (d, *J* 7, C¹²), 45.1 (s, C⁷), 16.4 (d, *J* 7, C¹³), 16.3 (d, *J* 106, C¹¹), 14.2 (s, C¹⁰); ³¹P (243 MHz, CDCl₃) + 45.6; ESI-LRMS $[C_{13}H_{19}{}^{79}BrNO_4P]^+$ (+) *m/z* 364.5; ESI-HRMS calcd for $[C_{13}H_{19}{}^{79}BrNO_4P]^+$ 364.0313 found, 364.0320.

Ethyl 2-((2-(ethoxy(methyl)phosphoryl)-4-((triisopropylsilyl)ethynyl)phenyl) amino)acetate, (8)



Compound (7) (757.0 mg, 2.09 mmol) was dissolved in anhydrous THF (7 mL) and the solution was degassed via three freeze-pump-thaw cycles. (Triisopropylsilyl)acetylene (2.4 mL, 10.7 mmol), triethylamine (2.2 mL, 15.8 mmol), Pd(dppf)Cl₂ (157.3 mg, 0.21 mmol) and copper iodide (116.3 mg, 0.61 mmol) were added, and the solution was degassed via a further three freeze-pump-thaw cycles. The solution was stirred at 65 °C for 3 d under an inert atmosphere of argon. Reaction completion was determined by ESI mass spectrometry. The solvent was removed under reduced pressure to form a dark brown residue. Purification by silica gel column chromatography (gradient 100 % hexane to 100 % ethyl acetate 4:1) formed the title compound as a pale brown oil which slowly solidified to a pale brown solid overnight (747 mg, 77 %). m.p = 82 $^{\circ}$ C – 83 $^{\circ}$ C; ¹H NMR (600 MHz, CDCl₃) 7.71 (1 H, br s, NH), 7.47 (1 H, dd, J 14, 2, H³), 7.42 (1 H, dd, J 9, 2, H⁵), 6.40 (1 H, dd, J 9, 6, H⁶), 4.21 (2 H, q, J7, H¹²), 4.16 – 3.87 (4 H, m, H⁸ and H¹⁰), 1.68 (3 H, d, J 15, H⁷), 1.32 (3 H, t, *J* 7, H⁹), 1.26 (3 H, t, *J* 7, H¹³), 1.10 (21 H, s, H¹⁶ and H¹⁷); ³¹P NMR (243 MHz, CDCl₃) + 46.6; ¹³C NMR (151 MHz, CDCl₃) 170.1 (s, C¹¹), 150.8 (d, J7, C¹), 137.6 (d, J 2, C⁵), 136.5 (d, J 10, C³), 113.4 (d, J 123, C²), 111.3 (d, J 14, C⁴), 110.7 (d, J 10, C⁶), 61.3 (s, C¹²), 106.8 (s, C¹⁴), 88.5 (s, C¹⁵) 60.9 (d, J, 6, C⁸), 45.0 (s, C^{10}), 18.7 (s, C^{17}), 16.5 (d, J 105, C^{7}), 16.3 (d, J 7, C^{9}), 14.2 (s, C^{13}), 11.3 (s, C^{16}); ESI-LRMS $[C_{24}H_{41}NO_4PSi]^+$ (+) m/z 466.2; ESI-HRMS calcd for $[C_{24}H_{41}NO_4PSi]^+$ 466.2543 found 466.2535.

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Ethyl 2-((2-(ethoxy(methyl)phosphoryl)-4-(naphthalen-1-ylethynyl)phenyl) amino) acetate, (9)



Compound (8) (109.7 mg, 0.24 mmol) and 1-bromonaphthalene (31 μ L, 0.22 mmol) were dissolved in anhydrous THF (1 mL) and the solution was degassed by three freeze-pump-thaw cycles. Triethylamine (0.7 mL), Pd(dppf)Cl₂ (40.6 mg, 0.06 mmol) and copper iodide (42.1 mg, 0.22 mmol) were then added and the solution was degassed once more. Tetrabutylammonium fluoride (TBAF, 1 M solution in THF, 0.35 mL, 0.35 mmol) was then added before the brown solution was degassed with three final freeze-pump-thaw cycles. The reaction mixture was stirred at 65 °C for 18 h under an inert atmosphere of argon, before the solvent was removed under reduced pressure to form a dark brown / black residue. Purification by column chromatography (gradient 100 % hexane to 100 % ethyl acetate) formed the title compound as a pale orange oil (78 mg, 20 %). ¹H NMR (700 MHz, CDCl₃) 8.40 (1 H, d, J 8, H^{20'}), 7.85- 7.83 (2 H, m, H^{17'} and NH), 7.80 (1 H, d, J 8, H²⁰), 7.71 (1 H, dd, J 7, 1, H¹⁸), 7.65 (1 H, dd, J 15, 2, H³), 7.60 – 7.56 (2 H, m, H⁵ and H^{19'}), 7.52 – 7.50 (1 H, m, $H^{18'}$), 7.44 – 7.42 (1 H, m, H^{19}), 6.51 (1 H, dd, J 9, 6, H^{6}), 4.24 (2 H, q, J 7, H^{12}), 4.19 – 3.93 (4 H, m, H¹⁰ and H⁸), 1.73 (3 H, d, J 15, H⁷), 1.35 (3 H, t, J 7, H⁹), 1.28 (3 H, t, J7, H¹³); ¹³C NMR (176 MHz, CDCl₃) 170.1 (s, C¹¹), 151.0 (d, J6, C¹), 137.1 (d, J 2, C⁵), 136.2 (d, J 10, C³), 133.2 (d, J 14, C²), 130.0 (s, C¹⁸), 128.3 (s, C^{17'} and C²⁰), 126.6 (s, C^{19'}), 126.4 (s, C^{18'}), 126.2 (s, C^{20'}), 125.3 (s, C¹⁹), 121.2 (s, C²¹), 112.5 (s, $C^{17'}$ or $C^{21'}$), 111.7 (s, $C^{17'}$ or $C^{21'}$), 111.1 (s, C^4), 110.0 (d, J 10, H^6), 94.1 (s, C^{14}), 86.1 (s, C¹⁵), 61.4 (s, C¹²), 60.9 (d, J 6, C⁸), 45.1 (s, C¹⁰), 16.44 (d, J 106, C⁷), 16.4 (d, J 7, C⁹), 16.1 (s, C¹³); ³¹P NMR (283 MHz, CDCl₃) + 46.7; ESI-LRMS $[C_{25}H_{27}NO_7P]^+$ (+) *m/z* 436.4; ESI-HRMS calcd for $[C_{25}H_{27}NO_7P]^+$ 436.1678 found 436.1672.

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2-((2-(Hydroxy(methyl)phosphoryl)-4-(naphthalen-1-ylethynyl) phenyl)amino) acetic acid, L⁴



The ethyl ester of L^4 (9) (46.0 mg, 0.10 mmol) was dissolved in CD₃OD (1.8 mL) containing NaOD (0.4 M in D₂O, 0.2 mL). The pale yellow solution was stirred under argon at room temperature for 4 d. Ester hydrolysis was confirmed by ¹H NMR spectrometry, and ESI-LRMS. The solution was then lyophilised to form the title compound as a pale brown solid, in quantitative conversion (30 mg). QToF-LRMS $[C_{21}H_{17}NO_4P]^-$ (-) *m/z* 466.1; ESI-HRMS calcd for $[C_{21}H_{17}NO_4P]^-$ (-) 378.0905 found 378.0895. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, D₂O) 8.19 (1 H, d, *J* 8), 7.69 – 7.60 (3 H, m), 7.48 – 7.47 (1 H, d, *J* 7), 7.43 (1 H, t, *J* 7), 7.36 – 7.21 (4 H, m), 6.27 (1 H, m), 1.32 (3 H, d, *J* 14); ³¹P (176 MHz, D₂O) + 31.7; Reverse phase HPLC (0 % - 100 % - 0% CH₃CN in ammonium bicarbonate buffer (25 mM)), $t_{\rm R} = 6.6$ min; $\phi_{H_2O} = 0.8$ %.

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Key Words Magnesium; fluorescence; selectivity; ligand; calcium

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