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ARTICLE

Developing colloidal nanoparticles for inkjet printing of devices with optical properties tuneable from the UV to the NIR

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Colloidal low-dimensional photo-sensitive nanomaterials have attracted significant interest for optoelectronic device applications where inkjet printing offers a high accuracy and low waste route for their deposition on silicon-based, as well as flexible, devices. However, to achieve photodetection and displays with absorption and emission tuneable across the range from the ultraviolet (UV) to the near infrared (NIR), the availability of printable optically active materials needs to be addressed. In this work we develop printable ink formulations of graphene quantum dots (GQDs), NaYF₄: (20%Yb and/or 2%Er doped) upconverting nanoparticles (UCNPs), and PbS quantum dots (QDs) and demonstrate their use in devices such as graphene-based photodetectors and fluorescent displays. The ink formulations, printing strategies and post-deposition techniques were developed and optimised to enable the deposition of photo-sensitive nanomaterial layers in a controllable manner onto flexible polymeric, glass and silicon substrates. The nanomaterials retained their properties post deposition, as we exemplify by photosensitisation of single layers graphene (SLG) photodetector devices, with spectral responsivity tuneable from the UV for GQD/SLG to the NIR for UCNP/SLG and PbS/SLG devices, with photoresponsivity up to $R \sim 10^3$ A/W. Fluorescent displays were also demonstrated consisting of CsPbBr₃ perovskite nanocrystals and UCNPs inkjet printed onto flexible transparent substrates, for selective sensing of UV and NIR light. This work successfully expands the material library of printable optically active materials and demonstrates their potential for printed optoelectronics, including flexible devices.

Introduction

Colloidal low-dimensional optically active nanoparticles are attracting significant attention for device applications such as solar cells,¹ LED/displays,^{2,3} and photodetectors^{4,5} due to their band gap tunability across a wide range of the electromagnetic spectrum from the UV to the NIR.⁶ Inkjet printing is of particular interest and can offer manufacturing solutions for high accuracy and low waste deposition of nanomaterials onto a variety of substrates from silicon compatible wafers to flexible polymeric films,^{7–13} which cannot be easily achieved with traditional manufacturing. To date, several reports demonstrated inkjet deposition of colloidal nanoparticles. For example, graphene detectors with optically active layers, deposited using additive

manufacturing technologies, were demonstrated with colloidal 0D quantum dots (e.g. ZnO QDs,¹² PbS QDs,^{7,8} HgTe QDs⁹) and perovskite nanoparticles.^{10,11} For applications requiring narrow absorption, particularly in the NIR, lanthanide doped upconverting nanoparticles (UCNP) are being investigated,^{14,15} such as NaYF₄: 20%Yb³⁺, 2%Er³⁺; with an absorption peak centred at 976 nm and a full width at half maximum (FWHM) of 15 nm,¹⁶ they are of interest for a range of applications from bioimaging to fluorescent displays.^{14,15,17,18} More recently, carbon based materials, such as graphene quantum dots (GQDs), have emerged as biocompatible nanomaterials that are optically active in the UV range.¹⁹ However the availability of printable optically active materials is limited and requires bespoke ink formulations. To address the limited availability of inks of functional materials for inkjet manufacturing of optoelectronic devices, there is a need to explore strategies for versatile ink formulations that are applicable to nanoparticles with different composition. This will also allow new opportunities for the exploration of combined multiple nanoparticles in a single device to achieve specific spectral sensitivities.

Here we develop printable ink formulations of GQDs, NaYF₄: (20%Yb and/or 2%Er doped) UCNPs, and PbS QDs inks and

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demonstrate their use for devices such as graphene-based photodetectors and fluorescent displays. By developing and optimising ink formulations, printing strategies and post-deposition techniques, photo-sensitive nanomaterial layers were deposited in a controllable manner onto glass, silicon and flexible polymeric substrates, and were also integrated into printed heterostructures. We exemplify the potential use of our nanomaterial ink formulations by using them as surface functionalisation layers in single layers graphene (SLG) photodetectors, where spectral responsivity up to $R \sim 10^3$ A/W can be achieved and is tuneable from the UV for GQD/SLG to the NIR for UCNP/SLG and PbS/SLG devices. We also explore deposition of multiple inks into one structure, illustrating that devices such as fluorescent displays can be produced, as we report here with CsPbBr₃ perovskite NCs and UCNP inkjet printed onto flexible transparent substrates. This work expands the material library of printable optically active nanomaterials and showcases their prospective use for printed optoelectronics, including flexible devices.

Results and Discussion

For this work we selected a number of optically active colloidal nanomaterials including water dispersed GQDs and PbS QDs as well as non-polar organic solvent dispersed UCNPs and perovskite NCs¹⁰ (Figure 1a). Optical properties of the nanoparticles depend on their size and composition, and our four selected materials have absorption and emission that is tuneable across the wavelength range from the UV to the NIR. This selection allows us to establish protocols for the formulation and inkjet deposition of water-based and non-polar solvent-based nanoparticle inks (Figure 1a-c). Inkjet printing offers a high degree of geometric freedom, where versatile

designs can be deposited in a drop-on-demand manner, also bringing material saving benefits. Here we demonstrate these advantages by printing designs from GQD honeycomb lattice to CsPbBr₃ and PbS QD geometric shapes to recreating building outlines with UCNPs (Figure 1d-g).

Ink formulations need to satisfy the rheological requirements for inkjet deposition,²⁰ while ensuring compositional and colloidal stability of the nanoparticles. For water based inks, GQDs (size of < 10 nm) and PbS QDs capped with dihydroliipoic-acid polyethylene-glycol-amine (DHLLA-PEG₄₀₀-NH₂) ligands (average diameter $d = 3.0 \pm 1.0$ nm)²¹ were used (Figure 1b and S11, Figure S1). To formulate the inks, QDs were added to a mixture of water, butanol and isopropyl alcohol (IPA) (8.6:0.32:1.1 v/v) to form a solution with final QD concentration of 1 mg/ml. The solvents were selected for ink formulation based on their distinct boiling points and surface tensions (80 °C, 100 °C, 120 °C and 22 mN·m⁻¹, 72 mN·m⁻¹, 24 mN·m⁻¹ for IPA, water, and butanol, respectively) in order to inhibit the coffee ring effect.²² The inks had an inverse Ohnesorge number of $Z = 31.5$ for PbS QDs and $Z = 19$ for GQDs, which allowed consistent drop formation without any satellite droplets or instability over time. The drop formation and contact angle analysis were performed (S11, Figure S2). As expected, the contact angle for water-based inks was $\sim 40^\circ$, while organic solvent-based inks had low contact angles of $< 5^\circ$ on Si/SiO₂ substrates. The printing was performed on a Dimatix inkjet printer in air with a substrate temperature of $T_{\text{substrate}} = 60^\circ\text{C}$ to facilitate solvent evaporation during printing. After printing, films were annealed in air at 100 °C for 30 minutes to remove any residual solvents.

Continuous printed films of PbS QDs were achieved on Kapton, polyethylene naphthalate (PEN), glass and Si/SiO₂ substrates after the deposition of $n_L = 4$ printed layers (Figure 1f). Note that

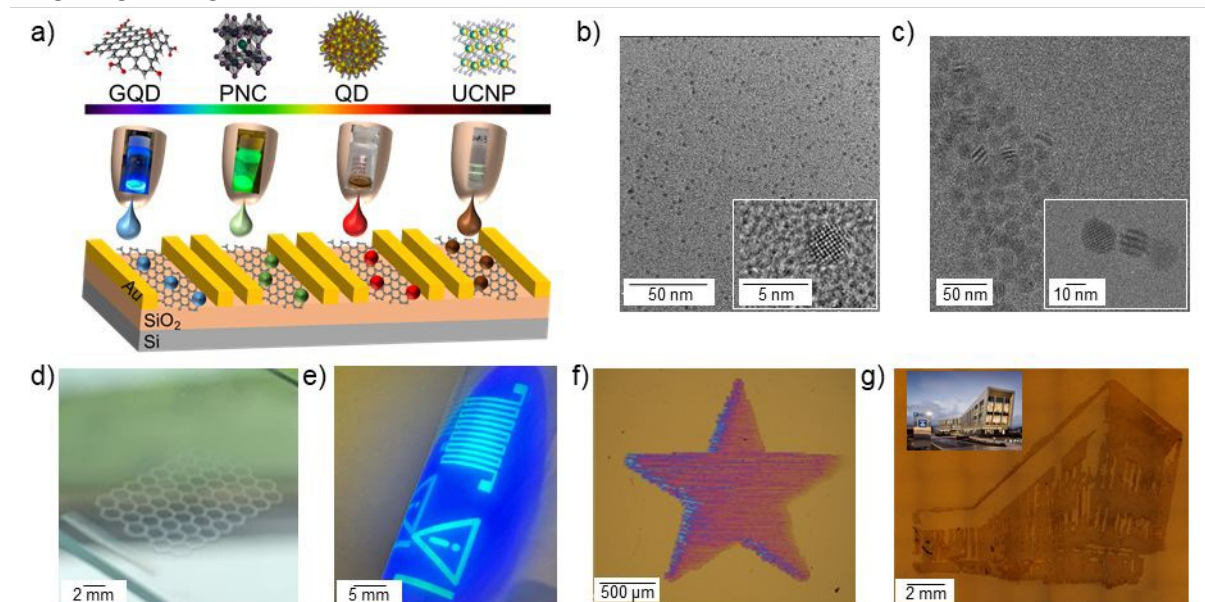


Figure 1. a) Schematic diagram of nanoparticles formulated for inkjet printing, including graphene QDs sensitive in the UV range, perovskite NCs sensitive in the visible range, and semiconductor QDs and upconverting NPs sensitive in the NIR range. Representative TEM and (insets) HR-TEM images of b) PbS QDs and c) β -NaYF₄: 20%Yb³⁺, 2%Er³⁺ UCNPs. Optical images of d) 5 printed layer GQD-PVP in honeycomb pattern (14 × 10 mm pattern size) on glass, e) 5 printed layers of CsPbBr₃ NCs on PEN (32 × 10 mm pattern size), with green fluorescence under $\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 365$ nm illumination, f) 4 printed layer PbS QD in a star pattern on Si/SiO₂ substrate, and g) 5 printed layer UCNP pattern on flexible Kapton substrate printed in the design of Advanced Manufacturing Building at the University of Nottingham (photo in the inset).



a single printed droplet has a spot size of $\sim 30 \mu\text{m}$ on Si/SiO₂ (Figure S2). Importantly, the optical properties of the PbS QDs were preserved following ink formulation and the inkjet deposition process, with PbS QD films displaying an optical emission peak centred at $\lambda \sim 990 \text{ nm}$ (S11, Figure S1b).

Nanomaterials dispersed in non-polar solvents were formulated following the modified protocol, which we developed for perovskite NCs.¹⁰ Here we used CsPbBr₃ NCs (size $\sim 11 \pm 1 \text{ nm}$)¹⁰ (Figure 1e), NaYF₄: 20%Yb, 2%Er UCNPs, (Figure 1g), and NaYF₄: 2%Er UCNPs synthesized by a thermal

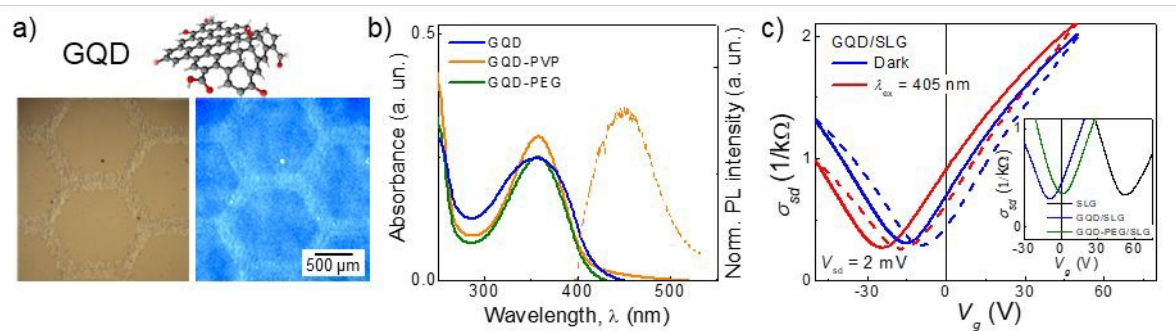


Figure 2. a) Optical image of 5 printed layer GQD-PVP film in honeycomb pattern on glass substrate under white light (left) and under illumination with $\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 365 \text{ nm}$ (right). b) Optical absorbance (solid lines) and PL intensity (dashed line) of printed GQD, GQD-PEG, and GQD-PVP films. c) Dependence of GQD/SLG source-drain current, σ_{sd} , on applied gate voltage, V_g , in the dark (blue), and under constant ($\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 405 \text{ nm}$, $P = 56.6 \text{ W/m}^2$) excitation (red). V_g is swept from -50 V to $+50 \text{ V}$ ($+90 \text{ V}$ for SLG) (solid lines) and then back to -50 V (dashed lines) ($V_{\text{sd}} = 2 \text{ mV}$, sweep rate = 0.17 V/s). Inset: Dependence of σ_{sd} on V_g for SLG, before and after deposition of GQDs and GQDs-PEG on top. V_g swept from -50 V to $+50 \text{ V}$ ($+90 \text{ V}$ for SLG),

For GQDs, de-wetting was observed on Kapton, PEN and Si/SiO₂ substrates; printed films formed many isolated islands with a diameter $\sim 15 \mu\text{m}$ (Figure S2). The difference in wetting between the two inks is due to the PEG ligands on the PbS QDs resulting in reduced viscosity and increased surface tension of the ink. More favourable wetting was observed for the GQD ink on glass, where a single printed droplet has a diameter of $\sim 40 \mu\text{m}$ and continuous films were achieved after the deposition of $n_L = 5$ printed layers. However, non-optimal wetting still caused non-uniformity in printed films. This was accompanied by quenching of PL emission, due to aggregation of GQDs. To ensure colloidal stability and dispersion of the GQDs in the ink, and to improve substrate wetting, a small amount (0.86 mg/ml) of the polymers PEG or polyvinylpyrrolidone (PVP) was added to form the GQD-PEG and GQD-PVP inks, respectively. The inks had $Z = 47$ for GQD-PEG and $Z = 21$ for GQD-PVP, which allowed consistent jetting to be achieved. The GQD-PVP ink displayed the best wetting and film uniformity; a single printed droplet left a spot size of $\sim 30 \mu\text{m}$ on Si/SiO₂ and Kapton substrates, and continuous GQD films were printed on Si/SiO₂, glass, Kapton and PEN substrates after the deposition of $n_L = 5$ printed layers (Figure 1d and Figure 2a). Some non-uniformity of the intensity of optical emission was revealed by PL mapping (S11, Figure S3), likely due to the high surface tension and low viscosity of the ink, which causes a capillary force that pulls the ink towards the start of the printing swathe (left) during drying.²³ Both printed films, GQD-PEG and GQD-PVP, displayed visible fluorescence and PL peak at $\lambda = 485 \text{ nm}$ under UV excitation ($\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 365 \text{ nm}$) (Figure 2a-b). For GQD films stored at ambient conditions, a PL peak was also recorded at $\lambda = 610 \text{ nm}$ which is attributed to QD oxidation. The emission and absorption spectra of the GQD-PEG and GQD-PVP do not show any evidence of QD oxidation (Figure 2b and S11, Figure S3c). Hence, the addition of these polymers into the ink formulation not only improves the uniformity and optical properties of the printed films, but also prevents the QDs oxidation, enhancing their environmental stability.

coprecipitation method (diameter $d = 18.8 \pm 1.7 \text{ nm}$) (Figure 1c and S11, Figure S4).²⁴ UCNPs were formulated in a mixture of hexane, cyclohexanone, and terpineol (1:3:1 v/v) with a final UCNPs concentration of 20 mg/ml and inverse Ohnesorge number of $Z = 7$. This is lower than the $Z = 17$ observed in the perovskite ink, which is due to the increased nanoparticle size and higher concentration of the UCNP leading to a greater ink viscosity. A single droplet of UCNP on Si/SiO₂ substrate has a diameter of $\sim 35 \mu\text{m}$, comparable to the drop of perovskite ink ($\sim 40 \mu\text{m}$). Higher nanoparticle loading in the UCNPs ink enabled deposition of continuous thin films with a single printed layer, as well as films produced with $n_L \geq 10$. Both UCNP inks showed a sharp absorption peak at 980 nm and the printed films displayed fluorescence under $\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 980 \text{ nm}$ illumination with two PL peaks centered at 540 nm and 654 nm (S11, Figure S4b), confirming that the optical properties of the UCNPs are retained in inkjet printed films. The printed NaYF₄: 20%Yb 2%Er UCNPs films displayed green fluorescence and printed NaYF₄: 2%Er UCNPs films displayed orange fluorescence due to the different ratios of PL peak intensities. Raman spectroscopy mapping indicated that the uniformity of the UCNP distribution in the printed film is increased with increasing number of printed layers from $n_L = 1$ to 10 (S11, Figure S5), however, small areas of UCNPs aggregates are observed, which can be attributed to the coffee ring effect.

To demonstrate the potential of our nanoparticle inks for device application, we explore their performance in two types of devices: photodetectors and fluorescent displays. For photon detection, our nanoparticle inks were printed onto a SLG device, discussed below, and act as a photosensitive layer. In this type of detector, the spectral range is defined by the absorption profile of the nanoparticles, where the photoresponsivity is affected by the transfer efficiency of photoexcited charges from the nanoparticles into graphene. Other parameters, such as nanoparticle PL lifetime, surface doping and carrier mobility of graphene also contribute to device performance.^{25,26}



Graphene field effect transistors (GFET) fabricated using CVD grown SLG placed on Si/SiO₂ substrate (SiO₂ layer thickness 285 nm)²⁷ were used as platforms for ink deposition. Pristine GFET devices demonstrated *p*-type conductivity with Dirac point (minimum conductivity) at $V_g \approx +50$ V (**Figure 2c**, inset, black line) corresponding to $p \approx 4 \times 10^{12}$ cm⁻² and mobility $\mu \approx 2000$ cm²/V·s, as is typical for this type of device.²⁷ Following the deposition of nanoparticle inks, the position of the Dirac point shifted toward negative gate voltages suggesting a strong *n*-type surface doping effect. For example, the Dirac point of a SLG device shifted from $V_g = +55$ V to $V_g = -5$ V ($n = 3.6 \times 10^{11}$ cm⁻²) after deposition of GQD ink (**Figure 2c**, inset, blue line). The electron mobility increased from $\mu_e = 2100$ cm²/V·s to $\mu_e = 3500$ cm²/V·s, while hole mobility decreased from $\mu_h = 3500$ cm²/V·s to $\mu_h = 2300$ cm²/V·s. We note that the difference in carrier mobility is likely due to the presence of both positive and negative impurities in SLG, which has different scattering rates for electrons and holes.

Deposition of GQD-PEG and GQD-PVP also resulted in surface doping and affected carrier mobility in graphene (**Figure 2c**, inset, green line and **SI2 Figure S6**). We note that these changes are accompanied by an increase in hysteresis of $\sigma_{sd}(V_g)$, which is affected by the sweep rate (**SI2, Figure S7**), and was previously observed in perovskite/graphene detectors and attributed to the slow charge accumulation in the layer of deposited nanocrystals acting as a top gate.^{25,26} To explore the charge dynamics of these devices, AC electrical measurements were performed (**SI2, Figure S7**), revealing constant capacitance of $C = 16$ pF for all frequencies in the range 10 Hz - 100kHz measured for pristine SLG GFET. Following deposition of GQD and GQD-PEG, the capacitance increased to $C > 100$ pF at low frequencies ($f < 50$ Hz), but remained similar, $C \approx 20$ pF, at high frequencies ($f > 10$ kHz). This result confirms that charge accumulation in the top QD or nanocrystal layer can be observed only at low frequencies due to slow charge transfer between the SLG and nanoparticles.²⁵ $\sigma_{sd}(V_g)$ dependence of GQD/SLG devices was also studied under constant illumination

with $\lambda_{ex} = 405$ nm (**Figure 2c**) which caused a further *n*-type shift in the position of the Dirac point by ~ -10 V. This photo-response is attributed to the transfer of photoexcited electrons from the GQDs into graphene, as was observed previously in perovskite/SLG devices.^{10,25} The largest photo-response was recorded close to the Dirac point, at $V_g = -4$ V during forward V_g sweeps.

Similar results were observed for SLG devices decorated with PbS QDs and UCNP, however, the magnitude of their effect on the electrical properties of the SLG is different, which is likely due to the different sizes of the nanoparticles and capping ligands used. It is known that for insulating nanoparticle films, the surface doping arises due to charge transfer from the nanoparticles in the immediate vicinity to the SLG, hence, the nanoparticle size and the packing density can affect the magnitude of the observed effect.²⁸ Indeed, for SLG devices decorated with PbS QDs (QD diameter ~ 3 nm; $n_L = 5$), a large *n*-type shift of the Dirac point was observed from $V_g = +30$ V to $V_g = -40$ V (corresponding to charge transfer $\Delta n = 5 \times 10^{12}$ cm⁻²). A smaller positive shift of the minimum of the $\sigma_{sd}(V_g)$ by $V_g \sim 10$ V ($\Delta n = 7 \times 10^{11}$ cm⁻²) was observed for the NaYF₄: 20%Yb 2%Er UCNP decorated device (NP diameter 19 nm; $n_L = 2$). These concentrations are in qualitative agreement with the surface density of the used QDs calculated assuming a hexagonal close packed (*hcp*) lattice (filling factor 0.74): 4.2×10^{12} cm⁻² for PbS QDs (size with capping ligands ~ 5.5 nm) and 2.9×10^{11} cm⁻² for UCNP (size with capping ligands ~ 21 nm).

These surface decorated FETs are photosensitive. The GQD decorated devices are photosensitive in the UV range, with responsivity R up to 5.3×10^2 A/W recorded with $\lambda_{ex} = 405$ nm (**Figure 3a**) and response time of $\tau_{ON} = 50$ s and $\tau_{OFF} = 800$ s (**SI2, Figure S8a**). The long response times are ascribed to the slow QD-SLG charge transfer and resulting photo-gating effect,²⁵ which is also associated with very large ($\gg 1$ A/W) responsivity due to long (> 1 s) life time of the photoexcited charges. Among the three studied GQD formulations, the highest photo-response $R = 5.3 \times 10^2$ A/W was measured for the GQD-PEG/SLG,

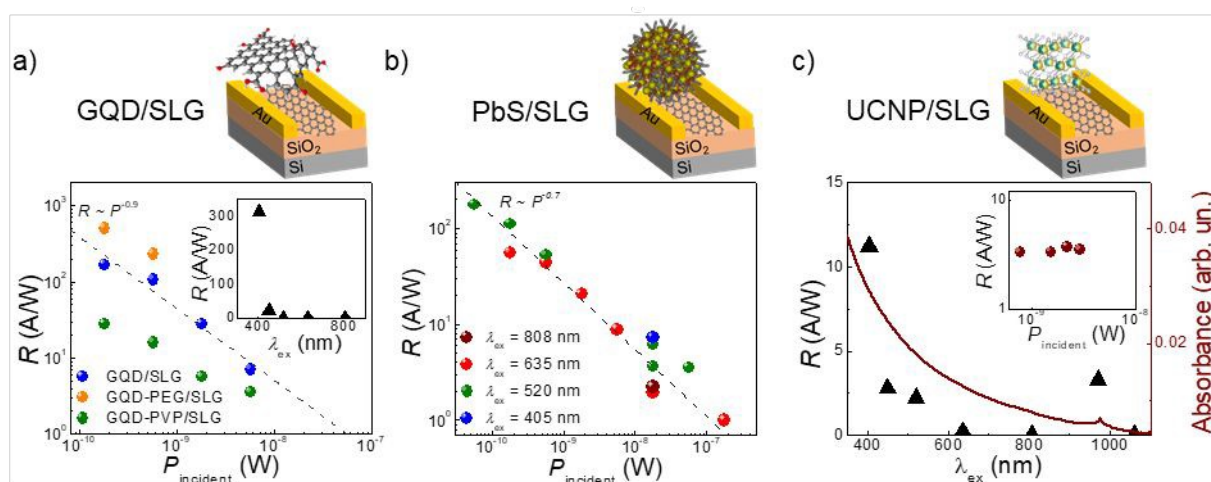


Figure 3. a) Photoresponsivity, R as a function of incident light power on the sample, P_{sample} , for the GQD/SLG, GQD-PEG/SLG and GQD-PVP/SLG devices. ($V_{sd} = 2$ mV, $V_g = 0$ V, $\lambda_{ex} = 405$ nm). Inset: R as a function of excitation wavelength, λ_{ex} , for the GQD/SLG ($V_{sd} = 2$ mV, $V_g = 0$ V, $P = 179$ W/m²) device. b) R as a function of P_{sample} for printed PbS QD/SLG device ($V_{sd} = 4$ mV, $V_g = 0$ V) for different λ_{ex} values ($V_{sd} = 4$ mV, $V_g = 0$ V). c) R as a function of λ_{ex} for printed UCNP/SLG device ($V_{sd} = 2$ mV, $V_g = 0$ V, $P = 5.7$ W/m²), with absorption spectra of UCNPs shown for comparison. Inset: R as a function of P_{sample} for printed UCNP/SLG device ($V_{sd} = 2$ mV, $V_g = 0$ V, $\lambda_{ex} = 970$ nm).



compared to $R = 1.7 \times 10^2$ A/W for the GQD/SLG (Figure 3a), which can be attributed to the beneficial effects of PEG preventing the oxidation of the QDs. It should be noted that the length of the polymer used can affect the charge transfer process by creating a dielectric barrier. Since we used short chain PEG ($M_w = 1000$ Da), this has not affected the charge transfer, unlike longer chain PVP ($M_w = 40,000$ Da), where lower maximum responsivity $R \sim 28$ A/W was observed.

Photoresponsivity across the visible and NIR range was recorded for PbS/SLG from 405 nm to 808 nm (Figure 3b), with no recorded photoresponse at $\lambda_{ex} = 1060$ nm. These devices reached a photoresponsivity of $R \leq 1.8 \times 10^2$ A/W and demonstrated recoverable ON/OFF response with $\tau_{ON} = 40$ s and $\tau_{OFF} \sim 300$ s (SI2, Figure S8b). All decorated SLG photodetectors had similar power dependence $R \sim P^{0.7}$, which was previously reported for this type of devices prepared using conventional drop-casting or spin-coating methods.^{28–30} As expected from the absorption profile with a narrow absorption band at 980 nm (FWHM = 15 nm), the UCNP/SLG device is photosensitive only in this wavelength range (Figure 3c). Under illumination with $\lambda_{ex} = 970$ nm, the device has $R \sim 3$ A/W and response times of $\tau_{ON} = \tau_{OFF} = 20$ s (SI2, Figure S8c). Interestingly, in these devices, R is independent of illumination power (Figure 3c, inset). This is an uncommon observation for decorated SLG photodetectors, which might indicate the presence of a photovoltaic effect,³¹ and merits further detailed studies.

molecules, and dielectric properties of the medium in which nanoparticles are embedded. We envisage that R can be further enhanced by optimising these parameters, to increase the packing density in the layer in immediate proximity to the SLG and pre-select capping material with a lower dielectric constant and shorter chain length.

To demonstrate the versatility of the formulated nanomaterial inks and benefits of geometric design freedom of the inkjet deposition method, we designed and printed a fluorescent UV and NIR sensor, in the shape of a laser-warning sign pattern onto a flexible and transparent PEN substrate, using the NaYbF₄: 2% Er³⁺ UCNP, with orange fluorescence, and the CsPbBr₃ perovskite NC, with green fluorescence, inks (Figure 4). We note that for the selected pair of materials, no energy transfer is expected: CsPbBr₃ with $\lambda = 514$ nm, $\lambda_{abs} < 510$ nm and NaYbF₄: 2% Er³⁺ UCNP with $\lambda = 654$ nm, absorption band centred at $\lambda_{abs} = 970$ nm. Under $\lambda_{ex} = 365$ nm and $\lambda_{ex} = 980$ nm, the sensor exhibited bright green and orange fluorescence, respectively, with well-defined patterns corresponding to the photoluminescence of the perovskite NCs and UCNP (Figure 4). Alternative pairs of materials can be selected to enable resonant energy transfer, which could be beneficial for applications, such as energy harvesting, biosensing etc. This work illustrates the opportunities that can be enabled by combining geometric design freedom with novel functional inks developed in this work.

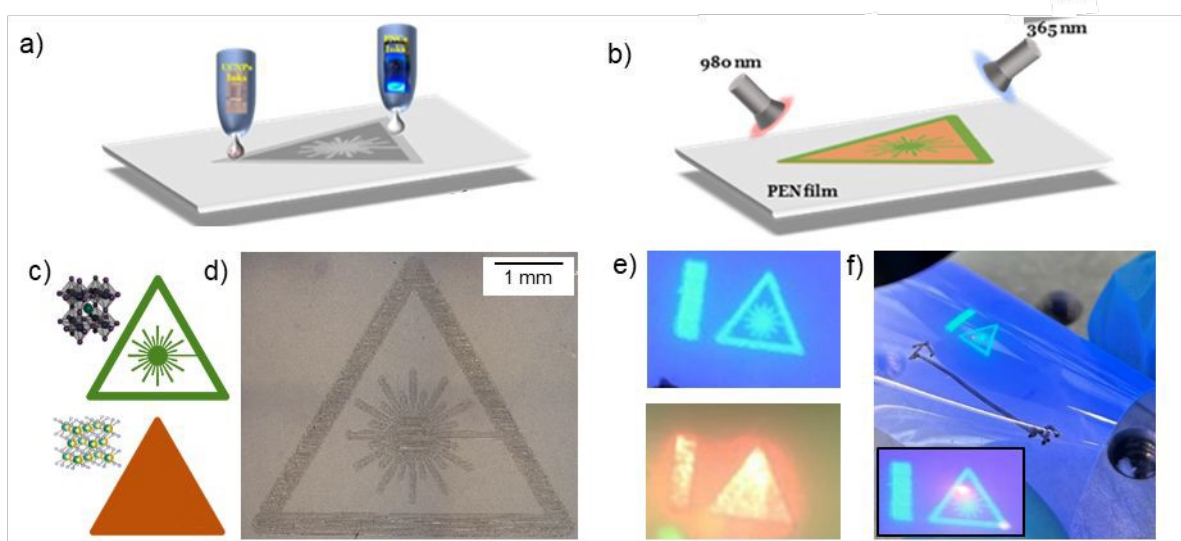


Figure 4. a) Schematic diagram of inkjet fabrication process of fluorescence sensors containing CsPbBr₃ perovskite NCs and NaYbF₄: 2% Er³⁺ UCNP on flexible PEN substrate. b) Schematic diagram showing the functionality of the sensors: upon 980 nm illumination, the solid triangle displays orange fluorescence from the UCNP. Under UV illumination the outline and pattern display green fluorescence from the perovskite NCs. c) Bitmaps used to print fluorescent sensor. The solid triangle of UCNP was deposited first, and the laser warning pattern of perovskite NCs was printed on top. d) Optical image of printed laser warning pattern of perovskite NCs with $n_l = 5$ printed layers. e) Optical images of fluorescence sensor under $\lambda_{ex} = 365$ nm illumination (top) and under $\lambda_{ex} = 980$ nm illumination (bottom). f) Optical images of fluorescence sensor undergoing bending, under dispersive $\lambda_{ex} = 365$ nm torch illumination with and focussed $\lambda_{ex} = 980$ nm laser illumination.

As such, we successfully used our formulated nanoparticle inks to deposit the photosensitive layers onto SLG devices producing photodetectors sensitive across the wavelength range from the UV to the NIR. The difference in photoresponsivity values observed in these devices is affected by a variety of factors, such as nanoparticle size, capping

These results demonstrate that inkjet deposition of optically active nanoparticles can provide a route for precise deposition and low-waste sustainable manufacturing, bringing the material advancements achieved in colloidal synthesis to industry relevant processes such as inkjet deposition. Increased availability of functional materials for additive manufacturing



could offer exciting opportunities for the development of next generation optoelectronic devices, fluorescence sensing and optical encoding among many others.

The results reported here demonstrate the benefits that can be achieved with inkjet printing of functional materials. Inkjet printing offers high degree of geometric design freedom combined with high precision of drop deposition ($\sim 10 \mu\text{m}$), which is not achievable by other solution processing technologies, such as drop-casting and spin coating. The drop-on-demand deposition provides low material waste and multi-material capabilities for fast (20 kHz) and scalable manufacturing of required pattern designs. In addition, compatibility of inkjet deposition with substrates used in traditional silicon-based technologies, offers unique opportunities for functionalisation of devices. For example, multiple SLG devices, typically produced on a single chip, can be selectively and accurately decorated with nanoparticles, for customisable photodetection, as demonstrated in our work.

Experimental Methods

Substrates and materials: Prime grade silicon wafers (200 nm SiO_2 thickness, PI-KEM) were cleaned by sonicating in acetone for 30 minutes at room temperature followed by washing with IPA and drying with N_2 . Other substrates, including polyimide (Kapton[®] HN, DUPONT), borosilicate glass slides (1 mm thickness, Fisher Scientific) and polyethylene terephthalate (PET, 125 μm thickness, GTS Flexible Materials Ltd) were washed with acetone, followed by IPA and dried with N_2 . Polyethylene naphthalate (PEN, 75 μm thickness, GTS Flexible Materials Ltd) substrates were washed with IPA and dried in N_2 . High quality CVD grown SLG on Si/SiO_2 (285 nm SiO_2) field effect transistors (FET) were provided by the Center for Nanotechnology Innovation at NEST, Italy.²⁷

Graphene quantum dot, GQD, solution (1 mg/ml in water, product number 900560) and graphene ink (2.4 wt% solid content in 85:15 mixture of cyclohexanone/terpineol, product number 793663) were purchased from Sigma Aldrich.

Synthesis of PbS QDs: The following chemicals were used for colloidal synthesis: Alfa Aesar: poly(ethylene glycol); Fisher Chemical: triethylamine, sodium bicarbonate, magnesium sulfate, chloroform, ethyl acetate, hydrochloric acid, dichloromethane, ethanol; Sigma Aldrich: tetrahydrofuran, sodium azide, triphenylphosphine, potassium hydroxide, sodium borohydride, sodium sulfide; Acros Organics: methane sulfonyl chloride, lipoic acid, lead acetate, EDC hydrochloride, 4-(*N,N*-dimethylamino)-pyridine. The chemical was used as received, without further purifications. Synthesis of $\text{NH}_2\text{-PEG}_{400}\text{-DHLA}$ capped PbS QDs with a Pb: S: L ratio of 1: 0.3: 3 was performed using the method reported previously.²¹ Briefly, PEG₄₀₀ (5.00 g, 12.5 mmol), methanesulfonyl chloride (5.8 mL, 75.0 mmol), tetrahydrofuran (THF), triethylamine (TEA), Sodium azide (4.4 g, 68.0 mmol), triphenylphosphine (first addition - 8.58 g, 32.7 mmol; second addition - second time: 3.18 g, 12.1 mmol), 4-(*N,N*-dimethylamino)-pyridine (0.27 g, 2.1 mmol) and EDC hydrochloride (2.26 g, 2.1 mmol) and lipoic acid (LA, 2.26g, 11.0 mmol) were reacted through a novel multiple steps ligand exchange routes. $\text{N}_3\text{-PEG}_{400}\text{-N}_3$, $\text{N}_3\text{-PEG}_{400}\text{-NH}_2$, $\text{N}_3\text{-PEG}_{400}\text{-LA}$ and $\text{NH}_2\text{-PEG}_{400}\text{-LA}$ were obtained as the reaction intermediates. The final $\text{NH}_2\text{-PEG}_{400}\text{-DHLA}$ (0.0864 g, 0.143 mmol) was

dissolved in water (10 mL) and the solution was degassed and stirred for 15 mins. $\text{Pb}(\text{OAc})_2$ (0.1 M, 0.48 mL) was added. The pH was adjusted to 11 with triethylamine (TEA). Na_2S (0.15 mL, 0.1 M) was added dropwise to form the nanocrystal under constant stirring. The reaction is performed under N_2 flow. The solution of QDs was stored under N_2 at 4°C.

Synthesis of the UCNPs: Yttrium (III) chloride hexahydrate ($\text{YCl}_3\cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 99.9%), ytterbium (III) chloride hexahydrate ($\text{YbCl}_3\cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 99.9%), erbium (III) chloride hydrate ($\text{YbCl}_3\cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$, 99.9%), oleic acid (OA, 90%) and 1-octadecene (ODE, 90%) were purchased from Sigma Aldrich. Ammonium fluoride (NH_4F , $\geq 98\%$) and sodium hydroxide (NaOH) were purchased from General Reagent, and hexane, methanol and acetone were purchased from Adams. All chemicals were used as received without further purification. The synthesis of $\text{NaYF}_4: 20\%\text{Yb}^{3+}$, 2% Er^{3+} nanoparticles and $\text{NaYbF}_4: 2\%\text{Er}^{3+}$ nanoparticles were performed by thermal coprecipitation method.³² Briefly, for synthesis of $\text{NaYF}_4: 20\%\text{Yb}^{3+}$, 2% Er^{3+} nanoparticles, 970.6 mg $\text{YCl}_3\cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (3.12 mmol), 310.0 mg of $\text{YbCl}_3\cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (0.80 mmol) and 30.5 mg $\text{ErCl}_3\cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (0.08 mmol) solid were combined with 20 ml oleic acid (OA) and 30 ml 1-octadecene (ODE) in a 250 ml three neck round bottom flask, and stirred under Ar atmosphere at temperature $T = 120^\circ\text{C}$ for 1 hour. After cooling to 50°C , 20 ml NaOH (0.5 M) methanol solution and 32 ml NH_4F (0.5 M) methanol solution added dropwise into the flask and stirred for 1h until the solution became clear. Then the solution was degassed at $T = 110^\circ\text{C}$ for 15 min to remove the residual oxygen, water and methanol. Then the solution was heated to 300°C for 1 h under continuous string. After cooling to room temperature, the nanoparticles were precipitated by acetone, and collected by centrifugation at 5000 rpm for 5 mins and washed three times with hexane/acetone (v/v: 1/4) solution and centrifugation. The final product was dried and collected powder was stored at room temperature in the ambient conditions.

Ink formulations: QD inks were formulated by mixing 1 mg/ml QD solution in water (0.86 mL) with butanol (0.032 mL) and IPA (0.11 mL), and sonicating at room temperature for 30 minutes. By adding 0.86 mg/ml of PEG ($M_w = 1000$), or by adding 0.86 mg/ml PVP ($M_w = 40,000$) and sonicating for 30 minutes at room temperature, QD-PEG and QD-PVP inks were formulated, respectively. The inks were stored in sealed Dimatix inkjet printing cartridges in ambient conditions. The QD ink had a viscosity of 1.23 mPa s, a surface tension of 30.9 mN/m, and density of 1.04 g/ml. The QD-PEG ink had a viscosity of 0.75 mPa s, a surface tension of 71.2 mN/m, and density of 1.06 g/ml. The QD-PVP ink had a viscosity of 1.18 mPa s, a surface tension of 32.6 mN/m, and density of 1.06 g/ml.

Inks for PbS QDs capped with PEG were made by mixing 1 mg/ml of PbS QDs (1 mL) with butanol (0.032 mL) and IPA (0.11 mL). The solution was then sonicated for 30 minutes at room temperature and stored under N_2 . The ink had a density of 1.01 g/cm³, a viscosity of 0.97 mPa S and a surface tension of 54.5 mN/m at room temperature.

UCNP inks were formulated for inkjet printing by dispersing 20 mg/ml of UCNPs in 1 mL mixture of hexane, cyclohexanone, and terpineol (1:3:1 v/v) and sonicating for 30 minutes at room temperature. The inks were stable and stored in ambient conditions.

Perovskite nanoparticle inks were formulated by dispersing 5 mg ml⁻¹ CsPbBr_3 NCs in a mixture of hexane, cyclohexanone, and terpineol (1:3:1 v/v) and sonicating for 30 minutes at



room temperature, and stored at room temperature under N₂ atmosphere.¹⁰

Inkjet printing process: All nanoparticle inks were deposited using piezo-driven Fujifilm Dimatix DMP-2800 inkjet printer. Printing of all inks was performed with 2.4 pL drop volume Dimatix Samba cartridges. For printing of GQD, GQD-PEG, and GQD-PVP inks the drop spacing of 20 μm and substrate temperature, $T_{\text{substrate}} = 60\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ were used. A 60 s pause was used between layers to prevent cartridge heating. Printed films were annealed at $T_{\text{anneal}} = 100\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ for 30 minutes in air to evaporate the solvents.

Printing of PbS QDs was performed with 20 μm drop spacing, $T_{\text{substrate}} = 60\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$. Printed PbS films were annealed at $T_{\text{anneal}} = 100\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ for 30 minutes in air. For printing of UCNP inks, 20 μm drop spacing and $T_{\text{substrate}} = 60\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ were used. Cleaning cycles were performed with purge for 0.1 s every layer. For post deposition, the UCNPs films were annealed at 250°C for 1 hour. Perovskite inks were printed under N₂ atmosphere with 20 μm drop spacing and $T_{\text{substrate}} = 60\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$. Cleaning cycles were performed with purge for 0.1 s every layer and films were dried on the print bed for 30 minutes after printing.¹⁰

Transmission Electron Microscopy and Energy Dispersive X-Ray Spectroscopy: The transmission electron microscopy (TEM) and energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX) were performed on the JEOL 2100F operating at 200kV equipped with a Gatan K3-IS direct detection camera. And 3 microliters dispersion of sample was drop-casting onto ultrathin carbon support (Agar Scientific ultrathin carbon on lacey amorphous carbon on 400 mesh Cu).

Raman Spectroscopy: Micro Raman spectroscopy was performed using a HORIBA LabRAM HR Raman microscope. Spectra were acquired using a 532 nm laser, a 100x objective, and a 200 μm confocal pinhole. To simultaneously scan a range of Raman shifts, rotatable diffraction grating (300 lines/mm) along a path length of 800 mm was employed. Spectra were detected using a Synapse CCD detector (1024 pixels) thermoelectrically cooled to -60 °C. Before spectra collection, the instrument was calibrated using the zero order line and a standard Si(100) reference band at 520.7 cm⁻¹. The spectral resolution is better than 3.8 cm⁻¹ in this configuration.

Optical characterisation: Photoluminescence (PL) mapping of GQDs was performed under vacuum using a 405 nm pulsed delta diode laser as the excitation source (pulse rate of 100 MHz with a time-averaged power ~ 10 μW and a spot size of ~ 2 μm) and a Horiba MiCOS optical spectrometer with Si CCD array detector and 50x objective, NA: 0.5, and 150 /mm grating. The samples were moved in steps of 20 μm using a motorised Zaber stage attached to the vacuum chamber/cryostat. PL spectra of UCNPs was obtained using Edinburgh FLS 1000 with excitation provided by 980 nm continuous laser diode (MDL-III-2W, China). Optical absorbance measurements were conducted with a Cary 3500 UV-Vis spectrophotometer. GQD absorption measurements were obtained by loading 0.01 mg/ml solution of GQD inks into quartz cuvettes (Hellma Analytics) and thin film absorption measurements were made by drop-casting onto quartz substrates. UCNP absorption measurements were obtained for 20 mg/ml UCNPs inks in Kartell PS 1.5mL cuvettes.

Electrical measurements: Electrical measurements and photocurrent measurements were performed using Keithley-2400 Source-Meters and Keithley-2010 multimeters in DC mode. Fixed wavelength excitations were provided by a set of six fibre-coupled diode-pumped solid state DPSS lasers with

calibrated output power controlled in the range 1 mW to 30 mW for all output wavelengths ($\lambda_{\text{ex}} = 405, 450, 532, 635, 808, 1060\text{ nm}$). A 970 nm fibre coupled laser (Thorlabs, M970F3, $P_{\text{min}} = 5.9\text{ mW}$) with a USB led driver (Thorlabs, upSERIES 1.4) was used as the NIR light source. Responsivity (R) was calculated by $R = I_{\text{pc}}/P_{\text{sample}}$ where I_{pc} is the maximum change in source-drain current (I_{sd}) recorded after one minute of constant illumination and P_{sample} is the total light power incident on the sample. Frequency dependent AC measurements of resistance and capacitance were performed using a Rohde & Schwarz HM8118 Bench LCR Meter.

Conclusions

In this work we formulated aqueous and non-polar solvent based inks of colloidal nanoparticles, and demonstrated inkjet printable optically active graphene QDs, PbS QDs, and lanthanide doped upconverting nanoparticles. The developed deposition and optimised post-deposition strategy enabled an exploration of the potential of these inks as photosensitive layers in graphene-based photon detectors with spectral responsivity tuneable by nanoparticle composition and size from the UV to the NIR, and in fluorescent displays using a combination of two nanoparticle layers. Further, these formulations demonstrate a framework by which future breakthroughs in optically active colloidal nanoparticle synthesis can be readily translated into reliable inkjet formulations for further device development. This work is of fundamental and technological interest, as it addresses current challenges by expanding the library of optically active materials for additive manufacturing technologies and provides advantages for the functionalisation of devices compatible with conventional Si-technologies as well as potential applications in flexible and wearable optoelectronics.

Author Contributions

J.A. and G.R. formulated inks. J.A., W.X., and F.W. performed inkjet printing. W.X. synthesised UCNPs and E.W. synthesised PbS QDs. JA, N.C, and W.X performed electrical measurements. JA, W.X, and T.J performed optical measurements. F.W., C. T., R. H., W.L., O. M., and L. T. conceptualised the studies. All authors analysed the results, co-wrote the manuscript and approved its submission.

Conflicts of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Data Availability Statement

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Data used in the manuscript are available from the corresponding author on request

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