Supporting Information

Photo-responsive hydrogels with photoswitchable mechanical properties allow time-resolved analysis of cellular responses to matrix stiffening

I-Ning Lee a,b,1, Oana Dobre c,d,1, David Richards d, Christoph Ballestrem c,d, Judith M. Curran b, John A. Hunt c,f, Stephen M. Richardson d,*, Joe Swift c,d,*, Lu Shin Wong a,*

a Manchester Institute of Biotechnology and School of Chemistry, University of Manchester, 131 Princess Street, Manchester M1 7DN, United Kingdom.

b School of Engineering, University of Liverpool, Harrison Hughes Building, Liverpool L69 3GH, United Kingdom.

c Wellcome Trust Centre for Cell-Matrix Research, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PT, United Kingdom.

d Division of Cell Matrix Biology and Regenerative Medicine, School of Biological Sciences, Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health, University of Manchester, Manchester M13 9PL, United Kingdom.

e School of Science and Technology, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham NG11 8NS, United Kingdom.

f Current address: School of Science and Technology, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham NG11 8NS, United Kingdom.

1 These authors contributed equally to this work.

* E-mail address: s.richardson@manchester.ac.uk, joe.swift@manchester.ac.uk, l.s.wong@manchester.ac.uk
1. Tables of prepolymer formulations.

**Table S1.** Formulations with ratios of AM/BIS/AZO monomers in DMF and EtOH.

| Formula | Monomer/Crosslinker | Solvent System | Heating | Observation |
|---------|---------------------|----------------|---------|-------------|
|         | AM (M) | BIS (mM) | AZO (mM) | EtOH (μL) | DMF (μL) | DMSO (μL) | H2O (μL) | PBS(a) (μL) |         |
| 1       | 1.65   | 26.26   | 10.12    | --       | 500     | --       | 500     | 225     | --          | x         |
| 2       | 1.72   | 27.37   | --       | --       | --      | 225     | --       | 725     | 225        | x         |
| 3       | 1.65   | 26.26   | --       | --       | 500     | --       | 500     | 225     | --          | x         |
| 4       | 1.84   | 29.22   | --       | 150      | --      | 725     | 225     | --      | hydrogel    |
| 5       | 1.84   | 29.22   | 225      | 150      | --      | 500     | 225     | --      | hydrogel    |
| 6       | 1.84   | 29.22   | 11.26    | 150      | --      | 725     | 225     | --      | precipitation |
| 7       | 1.84   | 29.22   | 5.63     | 225      | 150     | --      | 500     | 225     | --          | precipitation |
| 8       | 1.92   | 30.60   | 2.95     | 225      | 100     | --      | 500     | 225     | --          | precipitation |
| 9       | 1.92   | 30.60   | 2.95     | 225      | 100     | --      | 500     | 225     | 70°C        | hydrogel   |
| 10      | 0.41   | 6.59    | --       | 100      | --      | --      | 625     | 250     | --          | hydrogel   |
| 11      | 0.46   | 7.33    | --       | 45       | --      | --      | 580     | 250     | --          | hydrogel   |
| 12      | 0.41   | 6.59    | --       | 45       | 100     | --      | 580     | 250     | --          | hydrogel   |
| 13      | 0.46   | 7.33    | --       | 45       | 200     | --      | 380     | 250     | --          | x          |
| 14      | 0.46   | 7.33    | --       | 625      | --      | --      | 250     | --      | --          | x          |
| 15      | 0.41   | 6.59    | --       | 413      | 100     | --      | 212     | 250     | --          | x          |

(a) PBS: phosphate buffered saline

(b) “--” in this column indicates reaction was performed at room temperature.

(c) “x” in this column indicates no gel formation observed, mixture remained liquid
| Formula | Monomer/Crosslinker | Solvent System | Heating(b) | Observation(c) |
|---------|--------------------|----------------|------------|---------------|
|         | AM (M) | BIS (mM) | AZO (mM) | EtOH (μL) | DMF (μL) | DMSO (μL) | H2O (μL) | PBS(a) (μL) |   |
| 16      | 0.46   | 7.33    | --       | 625       | --       | --       | 250       | --           | x |
| 17      | 0.46   | 7.33    | --       | --         | 625       | 250      | --           | x |
| 18      | 2.81   | 0.14    | --       | --         | --       | 765      | 225       | --           | hydrogel |
| 19      | 2.81   | 0.11    | --       | --         | --       | --       | 765       | 225         | hydrogel |
| 20      | 2.81   | 0.07    | --       | --         | --       | --       | 765       | 225         | hydrogel |
| 21      | 2.79   | 0.14    | --       | 225        | --       | --       | 550       | 225         | hydrogel |
| 22      | 2.79   | 0.03    | --       | 225        | --       | --       | 550       | 225         | x          |

(a) PBS: phosphate buffered saline

(b) “--” in this column indicates reaction was performed at room temperature.

(c) “x” in this column indicates no gel formation observed, mixture remained liquid
### Table S3. Formulation of AM/BIS/AZO polymer heated during polymerisation.

| Formula | Monomer/Crosslinker | Solvent System | Heating | Observation |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------|---------|-------------|
|         | AM (M) | BIS (mM) | AZO (mM) | EtOH (μL) | DMF (μL) | DMSO (μL) | H2O (μL) | PBS (μL) |         |       |
| 23      | 2.87   | 45.68   | 4.40     | 100       | --       | --       | 600      | --       | 70°C    | hydrogel |
| 24      | 0.80   | 12.72   | 6.13     | 200       | --       | --       | 300      | --       | 70°C    | hydrogel |
| 25      | 1.32   | 20.92   | 10.08    | 100       | --       | --       | 200      | --       | 70°C    | hydrogel |
| 26      | 0.45   | 7.13    | 3.43     | 400       | --       | --       | 500      | --       | 70°C    | x        |
| 27      | 0.45   | 7.13    | 3.43     | --        | --       | --       | 900      | --       | 70°C    | precipitate |
| 28      | 0.45   | 7.13    | 3.43     | --        | --       | --       | 200      | 700      | 70°C    | precipitate |
| 29      | 0.45   | 7.13    | 3.43     | --        | --       | --       | 200      | 700      | 70°C    | precipitate |
| 30      | 0.45   | 7.13    | 3.43     | --        | --       | --       | 200      | 700      | 70°C    | precipitate |
| 31      | 0.45   | 7.13    | 3.43     | --        | --       | --       | 600      | 300      | 70°C    | precipitate |
| 32      | 0.45   | 7.13    | 3.43     | --        | --       | --       | 600      | 300      | 70°C    | precipitate |
| 33      | 0.40   | 6.36    | 3.06     | 100       | --       | --       | 100      | 800      | 70°C    | precipitate |

(a) PBS: phosphate buffered saline

(b) “--” in this column indicates reaction was performed at room temperature.

(c) “x” in this column indicates no gel formation observed, mixture remained liquid.
Table S4. Formulations with high concentrations of monomers.

| Formula | Monomer/Crosslinker | Solvent System | Heating | Observation |
|---------|---------------------|----------------|---------|-------------|
| AM (M)  | BIS (mM) | AZO (mM) | EtOH (μL) | DMF (μL) | DMSO (μL) | H2O (μL) | PBS(a) | (b) | Observation(c) |
| 34      | 0.50        | --          | 0.35     | --       | --        | 880     | --     | -- | precipitate |
| 35      | 0.80        | 0.28        | 4.46     | --       | --        | 650     | --     | -- | precipitate |
| 36      | 0.66        | 0.23        | 3.68     | --       | --        | 350     | 450    | -- | x          |
| 37      | 0.66        | 0.23        | 3.68     | --       | 250       | 450     | --     | -- | x          |
| 38      | 0.66        | 0.23        | 3.68     | 250      | --        | 550     | --     | -- | x          |
| 39      | 2.56        | 0.08        | 3.55     | 225      | --        | 420     | 225    | -- | precipitate |
| 40      | 2.30        | 0.07        | 3.19     | 325      | --        | 420     | 225    | -- | precipitate |
| 41      | 1.72        | 0.07        | 3.19     | 425      | --        | 320     | 225    | -- | precipitate |
| 42      | 1.15        | 0.07        | 3.19     | 525      | --        | 220     | 225    | -- | precipitate |
| 43      | 1.76        | --          | 3.26     | 425      | --        | 300     | 225    | -- | precipitate |
| 44      | 1.76        | --          | 3.26     | --       | 225       | 500     | 225    | -- | precipitate |
| 45      | 1.72        | 0.07        | 3.19     | --       | 225       | 520     | 225    | -- | x          |
| 46      | 0.59        | 0.07        | --       | --       | 225       | 500     | 225    | -- | x          |
| 47      | 1.15        | 0.07        | 3.19     | --       | 225       | 520     | 225    | -- | x          |
| 48      | 0.57        | 0.07        | 3.19     | --       | 325       | 420     | 225    | -- | x          |

(a) PBS: phosphate buffered saline

(b) “--” in this column indicates reaction was performed at room temperature.

(c) “x” in this column indicates no gel formation observed, mixture remained liquid.
**Table S5.** Formulations of AM/BIS/AZO monomers with various solvents.

| Monomer/Crosslinker | Solvent System | Heating(b) | Observation(c) |
|---------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| AM (M)              | BIS (mM)       | EtOH (μL)  | DMF (μL)       | DMSO (μL) | H2O (μL) | PBS(a) (μL) |
| 49                  | 2.30 0.07 1.59 | 325        | --             | --        | 420      | 225        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 50                  | 1.72 0.07 1.59 | 425        | --             | --        | 320      | 225        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 51                  | 1.15 0.07 1.59 | 525        | --             | --        | 220      | 225        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 52                  | 1.76 -- 3.26   | --         | --             | 225       | 500      | 225        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 53                  | 1.76 0.04 1.63 | --         | --             | 225       | 500      | 225        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 54                  | 1.17 0.04 1.63 | --         | --             | 125       | 600      | 225        | --           | precipitate  |
| 55                  | 1.17 0.04 1.63 | --         | --             | 100       | 625      | 225        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 56                  | 1.76 -- 1.63   | --         | --             | 225       | 300      | 425        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 57                  | 1.06 -- 1.47   | --         | --             | 100       | 200      | 750        | --           | precipitate  |
| 58                  | 1.06 -- 1.47   | --         | --             | 100       | 725      | 225        | --           | precipitate  |
| 59                  | 1.17 -- 1.63   | --         | --             | 225       | 200      | 525        | --           | precipitate  |
| 60                  | 1.06 -- 1.47   | --         | --             | 100       | 725      | 225        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 61                  | 0.59 -- 1.63   | --         | --             | 100       | 625      | 225        | --           | x            |
| 62                  | 1.17 0.04 1.63 | --         | --             | 225       | 500      | 225        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 63                  | 0.59 -- 1.63   | --         | --             | 225       | 100      | 625        | --           | x            |
| 64                  | 1.76 -- 0.81   | --         | --             | 225       | 300      | 425        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 65                  | 1.17 -- 0.41   | --         | --             | 113       | 200      | 637        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 66                  | 1.13 -- 0.16   | --         | --             | 45        | 200      | 737        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 67                  | 1.17 -- 0.81   | --         | --             | 225       | 200      | 525        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 68                  | 1.17 0.04 0.41 | --         | --             | 113       | 200      | 637        | --           | hydrogel     |
| 69                  | 1.17 0.04 0.16 | --         | --             | 45        | 200      | 705        | --           | hydrogel     |

(a) PBS: phosphate buffered saline

(b) “--” in this column indicates reaction was performed at room temperature.

(c) “x” in this column indicates no gel formation observed, mixture remained liquid
**Table S5.** Continued.

| Formula | Monomer/Crosslinker | Solvent System | Heating<sup>(b)</sup> | Observation<sup>(c)</sup> |
|---------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 70      | 1.76 -- 8.14        | 200 -- 225     | 300 225 --           | hydrogel                 |
| 71      | 1.59 -- 7.37        | 225 -- 100     | 300 425 --           | precipitate              |
| 72      | 1.56 -- 7.23        | 120 -- 220     | 300 430 --           | precipitate              |
| 73      | 1.56 -- 7.23        | 220 -- 220     | 300 330 --           | precipitate              |
| 74      | 2.45 -- 7.27        | 225 -- 100     | 375 150 --           | precipitate              |
| 75      | 2.20 -- 3.40        | 225 -- 100     | 360 225 --           | hydrogel                 |

<sup>(a)</sup> PBS: phosphate buffered saline

<sup>(b)</sup> “--” in this column indicates reaction was performed at room temperature.

<sup>(c)</sup> “x” in this column indicates no gel formation observed, mixture remained liquid.
Table S6. Formulations of AM/AZO polymer using improved conditions based on previous formulations.

| Formula | Monomer/Crosslinker | Solvent System | Heating(b) | Observation(c) |
|---------|---------------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|
|         | AM (M) BIS (mM) AZO (mM) | EtOH (μL) DMF (μL) DMSO (μL) H2O (μL) PBS(a) (μL) |             |                |
| 76      | 2.20 -- 6.79 | 225 -- 100 360 225 | --           | hydrogel with precipitated particulates |
| 77      | 2.20 -- 5.10 | 225 -- 100 360 225 | --           | hydrogel with precipitated particulates |
| 78      | 2.20 -- 3.40 | 180 -- 60 360 310 | --           | hydrogel       |
| 79      | 2.20 -- 6.79 | 180 -- 60 360 310 | --           | hydrogel with precipitated particulates |
| 80      | 2.20 -- 3.40 | 100 -- 60 360 390 | --           | hydrogel with precipitated particulates |
| 81      | 2.20 -- 3.40 | 100 -- 80 360 370 | --           | hydrogel       |
| 82      | 2.03 -- 3.13 | 100 -- 80 360 450 | --           | hydrogel with precipitated particulates |
| 83      | 4.05 -- 3.13 | 100 -- 80 720 90  | --           | hydrogel       |
| 84      | 1.01 -- 3.13 | 100 -- 80 180 630 | --           | precipitation  |
| 85      | 4.05 -- 3.13 | 100 -- 80 720 10  | --           | x              |
| 86      | 4.40 -- 6.79 | 100 -- 80 720 10  | --           | precipitation  |

(a) PBS: phosphate buffered saline

(b) “--” in this column indicates reaction was performed at room temperature.

(c) “x” in this column indicates no gel formation observed, mixture remained liquid.
Figure S1. Schematic diagram of the substrate preparation for cell culture.
Figure S2. Low magnification ESEM micrographs of photo-responsive hydrogels before and after irradiation. The images were recorded following the treatments indicated in Figure 4A at the point of “stiffness measurement”. (A) Control (“ctrl”) sample: AZO hydrogels not subjected to irradiation. (B) “(-) blue” sample: hydrogel treated with UV (365 nm) irradiation. (C) “(+) blue” sample: hydrogel treated with UV (365 nm) and subsequent blue light (490 nm) irradiation.
**Figure S3.** Cell viability following UV or blue light irradiation. Live cells are indicated by green fluorescence due to the generation of free calcein by intracellular esterases, while dead cells exhibit red fluorescence from ethidium, following loss of cell membrane integrity. (A) Primary human MSCs were subjected to different durations of UV (365 nm) or blue light (490 nm) irradiation. Cell viability was assayed by ethidium and calcein staining (scale bar = 100 µm). (B) Quantitative analysis of cell viability images. Exposure to blue light for up to 1 hour did not significantly reduce cell viability. Exposure to 10 minutes of UV irradiation significantly reduced cell viability to 18 ± 8 % (± S.E.M.; n > 177 measurements, cells from three donors; p-values indicated from ANOVA testing).
Figure S4. DNA damage following UV or blue light irradiation. (A) Primary human MSCs subjected to UV or blue light irradiation were imaged with the nuclei DAPI stained and immuno-stained against γH2AX pS139 (scale bar = 10 µm). (B) Quantification of the number of γH2AX pS139 foci per nucleus. Blue light exposure for up to 1 hour did not significantly increase the number of foci, but UV exposure of just 10 minutes created more foci than could be resolved with the microscope (n > 57 measurements, cells from three donors; significance from ANOVA and post hoc testing).