Introduction:

Current flow control solutions in analytical platforms have high power consumption and are prone to mechanical failure.

To scale down such analytical platforms and enable them to be incorporated into wireless sensor networks one needs revolutionary flow manipulation solutions[1]. Such solutions may come in the form of stimuli responsive materials.

Novel stimuli-responsive materials can:
- Shrink
- Bend
- Move
- Heat

After applying:
- Light
- Magnetic field
- Heat

Using flow controllers made out of these materials will dramatically reduce power consumption and size of the full device. (Fig. 1)

Research in this field will allow better water quality and environment monitoring.

Aim:

- Generate and control liquid flow within microfluidic manifolds using smart, stimuli responsive materials.
- Development and characterisation of magnetic responsive materials.
- Development and characterisation of photo responsive materials.
- These are to be used later in a parallel project aimed at manufacturing actuators for microfluidics.

Experimental:

Magnetic responsive material
- Magnetic Fe3O4 particles were coated with polymer linking groups (Fig. 2)
- These coated particles and an acrylamide monomer were dissolved in a hydrophobic ionic liquid[2] and then heated to form a soft magnetically actuated gel (Fig. 3)

Light responsive material:
- The same acrylamide and ionic liquid were linked with a light responsive spiropyran molecule (Fig. 4)

Conclusions:
- Magnetically actuated gels will be incorporated into microfluidic devices as pumping elements.
- Photo-shrinking soft gels can work as valves in analytical device’s sampling channels.
- Both materials require minimum energy to activate: permanent magnets and low power consumption LEDs
- Non toxic and hazardous substances contained in these materials allow them to be used in environment monitoring.

References: