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Article

Iridium-catalysed *ortho*-Directed Deuterium Labelling of Aromatic Esters – an Experimental and Theoretical Study on Directing Group Chemoselectivity

Jennifer Devlin,[1†] William. J. Kerr,[*1] David M. Lindsay,[1] Timothy J. D. McCabe,[1†] Marc Reid,[1†‡] and Tell Tuttle[1]

[1] Dept. of Pure & Applied Chemistry, University of Strathclyde, WestCHEM, 295 Cathedral Street, Glasgow, G1 1XL, UK. E-mails: jennifer.devlin.2013@uni.strath.ac.uk; w.kerr@strath.ac.uk; david.lindsay@strath.ac.uk; timothy.mccabe@strath.ac.uk; tell.tuttle@strath.ac.uk.

[†] These authors contributed equally to this work.

* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; E-Mail: w.kerr@strath.ac.uk; Tel.: +44-141-548-2959

[‡] Current address: School of Chemistry, University of Edinburgh, EastCHEM, David Brewster Road, Edinburgh, EH9 9FJ, UK. E-Mail: marc.reid@ed.ac.uk

Abstract: Herein we report a combined experimental and theoretical study on the deuterium labelling of benzoate ester derivatives, utilizing our developed iridium *N*-heterocyclic carbene/phosphine catalysts. A range of benzoate esters were screened, including derivatives with electron-donating and -withdrawing groups in the *para*-position. The substrate scope, in terms of the alkoxy group, was studied and the nature of the catalyst counter-ion was shown to have a profound effect on the efficiency of isotope exchange. Finally, the observed chemoselectivity was rationalized by rate studies and theoretical calculations, and this insight was applied to the selective labelling of benzoate esters bearing a second directing group.

1   **1. Introduction**

2   The ability to incorporate an isotopic label into a biologically-active molecule is of profound
3   importance in the drug discovery process. Such a radioactive 'tag' or 'label' can be used to provide
4   vital information on a compound's absorption, distribution, metabolism, excretion, and toxicological
5   (ADMET) properties. As a result of these uses, isotopic labelling is the gold standard method by which
6   early stage drug discovery processes can be optimised.
7   Research into deuterium (^{2}H or D) and tritium (^{3}H or T) labelling is more substantial than for other
8   isotopes, and has been developed on a number of fronts over the past 60 years.[1–10] Further to this,
9   key developments in synthetic strategies and analytical techniques for tritium labelling over the past
10   three decades now makes this the preferred technique for many ADMET studies.[5] In one particularly
11   active branch of such labelling research, hydrogen isotope exchange (HIE) is employed to deliver
12   either deuterium or radioactive tritium to pharmaceutical drug candidates in one synthetic step. As well
13   as circumventing the requirement for isotopically-enriched starting materials in preparing tritiated drug
14   candidates,[1,5] HIE can also provide analogous deuterated compounds for use as internal standards
15   for mass spectrometry,[11,12] for kinetic isotope studies,[13,14] and for the alteration of reaction
16   pathways in total synthesis.[15]
17   Over recent years, research in our laboratory has focused on the development of iridium(I) *N*-
18   heterocyclic carbene (NHC)-ligated precatalysts of the type **1**, and their application in HIE *via ortho*-
19   directed C-H activation protocols (**2→4** via **3**, **Scheme 1**).[6,16–22] Despite the growing list of
20   compatible directing groups, we[23] and others[24–27] have found these developed C-H activation
21   methods less applicable in the labelling of aromatic esters under ambient conditions. Herein, we report
22   the extension of our methodology to encompass the labelling of weakly coordinating benzoate ester
23   derivatives under mild conditions.
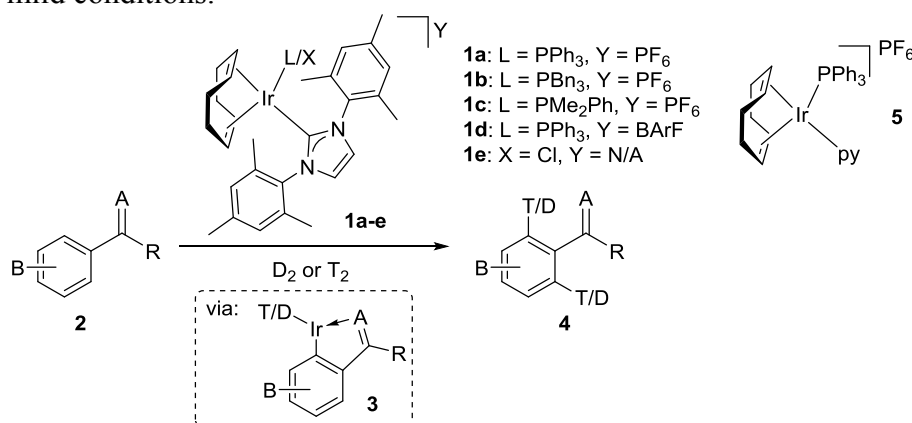
Scheme 1. General method for Ir-catalysed *ortho*-HIE *via* a C-H activation pathway.

26   **2. Results and Discussion**

27   *2.1. Catalyst Screening and Comparisons with Crabtree's Catalyst*

28   Until recently, Crabtree's catalyst, [(COD)Ir(PCy$_3$)(py)]PF$_6$, **5**, was the most widely applied iridium-
29   based HIE catalyst for labelling applications within an industrial setting.[28,24] As such, any studies
30   which evaluate our developed catalysts in the labelling of aromatic esters should also compare them

1 against the ability of **5** to mediate the same catalytic labelling reactions under identical
2 conditions.[19,29] To this end, and to initiate this research programme, the labelling of a series of
3 *para*-substituted ethyl benzoate derivatives **6** was examined, using our standard labelling protocol (5
4 mol% [Ir], 1 atm D_2, 1 h) with Crabtree's catalyst **5** (**Scheme 2**, blue bars) and our developed catalyst
5 systems **1b** and **1a** (**Scheme 2**, red and green bars, respectively). With the exception of the *p*-chloro
6 and *p*-methoxy esters (**6d** and **6e**), Crabtree's catalyst, **5**, proved relatively ineffective in the
7 deuteration of these ester substrates, with incorporations as low as 10% being observed with the
8 electron-withdrawing *p*-CF_3 ester **6c**. On assessing the larger and more electron-rich variant of our
9 catalyst series, **1b**, a significant improvement in labelling esters **6c** (X = CF_3) and **6d** (X = Cl) was
10 observed, whereas the other esters **6a**, **6b** and **6e** were labelled less efficiently relative to Crabtree's
11 catalyst. Only on employing our more Lewis acidic catalyst, **1a**, did we observe the most efficient and
12 encouraging improvement in ester labelling across all examples tested, with the exception of the parent
13 ethyl benzoate **6a**. We hypothesize that the more flexible Lewis acidity of **1a** *versus* **5** or **1b** partially
14 diminishes the importance of the ester coordination event and negative Hammett σ_p values,[30] and
15 simultaneously enhances the effect of positive σ_m in relation to a more facile C-H activation event. For
16 example, compare the order of substrate reactivity for catalyst **5** (OMe > Cl > Me > H > CF_3) *versus*
17 **1a** (OMe ~ Cl > CF_3 > Me > H). In the absence of more detailed reaction monitoring, we acknowledge
18 that the observed results cannot be directly related to the kinetically-derived Hammett values.
19 Nonetheless, the hypothesis remains feasible.

20

6a: X = H; 6b: X = Me; 6c: X = CF_3; 6d: X = Cl; 6e: X = OMe
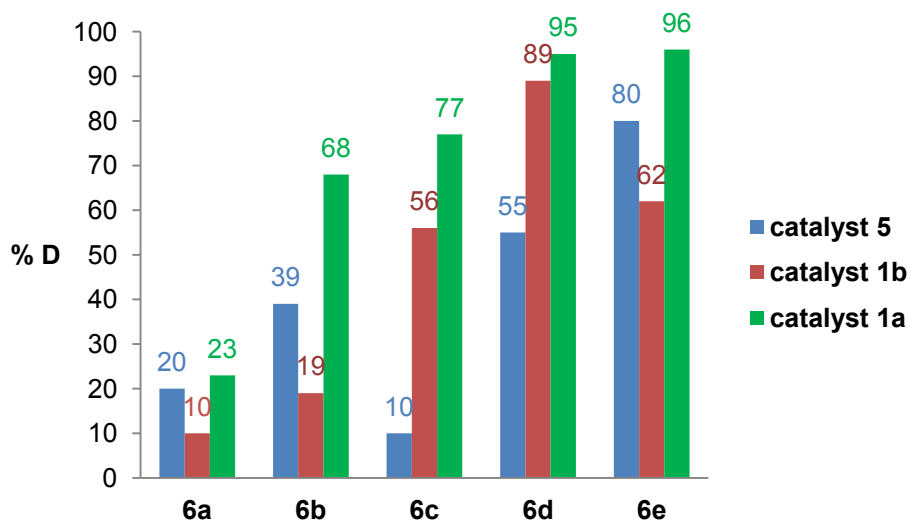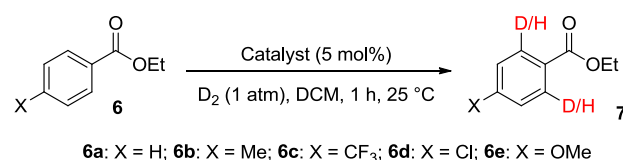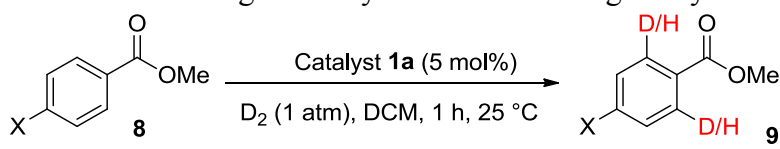
21
22   **Scheme 2**. Comparative labelling of ethyl benzoates **6** using catalysts **5**, **1b**, and **1a**.

23 *2.2 Applicable Substrate Scope with Catalyst **1a***

24 *2.2.1 Para-substituted Methyl Benzoates*

1   Using the most efficient of the three catalysts tested, catalyst **1a**, we investigated the possibility of
2   labelling methyl esters under the same conditions employed for the ethyl analogues **6** (**Table 1**). While
3   methyl esters **8d** and **8e** were labelled with high levels of deuterium incorporation, the other methyl
4   esters in the series proved more capricious. Specifically, substrates **8a**, **8b** and **8c** were repeated
5   multiple times, with individual deuterium incorporations ranging from 27% to 52% (see **Experimental**
6   **Section** for full details).

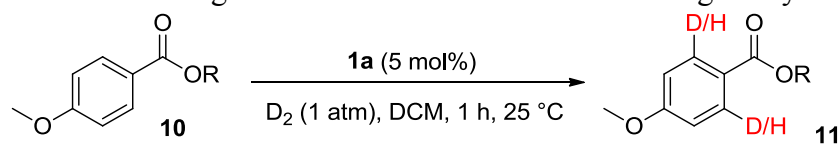7   **Table 1**. Labelling of methyl benzoates **8** using catalyst **1a**.

8

Entry	X	Substrate	%D[a]
1	H	**8a**	52
2	CH$_3$	**8b**	42
3	CF$_3$	**8c**	32
4	Cl	**8d**	93
5	OMe	**8e**	89

9   [a] %D incorporation is the average of two runs and was determined by ^{1}H NMR spectroscopy.

10   *2.2.2 Scope of O-Alkyl Substitution with Electron-rich Benzoate Esters*

11   Beyond methyl and ethyl benzoates, we also examined the applicability of larger *O*-alkyl ester
12   substitents using our labelling method (**Table 1**). We pursued this line of enquiry for *p*-
13   methoxybenzoate derivatives only, in order to minimise potential substrate coordination issues
14   associated with the aryl substituent. Whilst the *n*-propyl, 2,2,2-trifluoroethyl, and *tert*-butyl benzoate
15   derivatives **10a**, **10b** and **10c** unfortunately proved to be less applicable, *iso*-propyl and benzyl esters
16   **10d** and **10e** could be labelled with appreciable levels of deuterium incorporation.

17   **Table 2**. Labelling of electron-rich benzoate esters using catalyst **1a**.

18

Entry	R	Substrate	%D[a]
1	*n*-Pr	**10a**	28
2	CH$_2$CF$_3$	**10b**	8
3	*t*-Bu	**10c**	10
4	*i*-Pr	**10d**	73
5	Bn	**10e**	62

19   [a] %D incorporation is the average of two runs and was determined by ^{1}H NMR spectroscopy.

20   *2.3 Reaction Optimisation for Efficient Labelling of Challenging Benzoate Ester Substrates*

21   *2.3.1 Temperature Effects*

Due to the application of this hydrogen isotope exchange method in related tritiation chemistries,[6] significant effort is usually made to maintain ambient reaction conditions during the optimization of *ortho*-deuteration processes. Having stated this, the use of slightly raised reaction temperatures need not be completely discounted from such investigations. We therefore revisited the labelling of the most challenging methyl and ethyl benzoate derivatives, using a moderately increased reaction temperature of 40 ºC (**Scheme 3**). Pleasingly, dramatic improvements in deuterium incorporation were observed across all substrates examined, **6a-c** and **8a-c**, whilst the short reaction times were maintained.
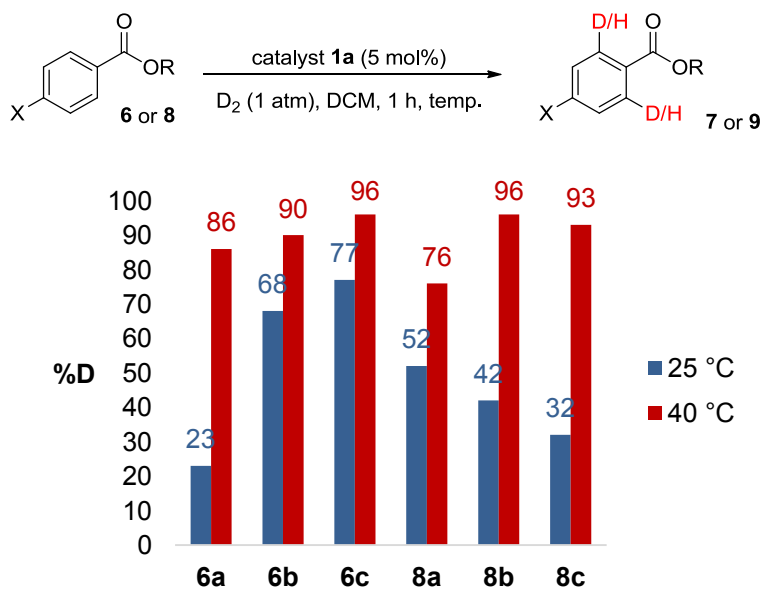
Scheme 3. Temperature effects on deuterium labelling of previously problematic benzoate esters.
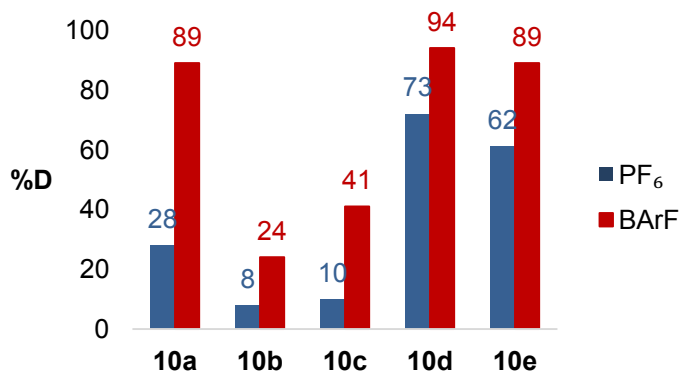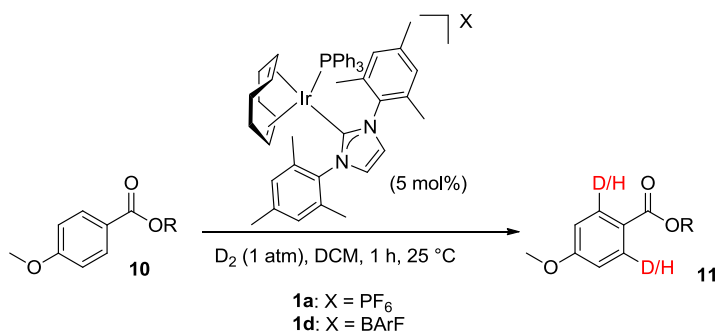
**Scheme 4**. Exploiting anion effects for improved ester labelling.

1   *2.3.2 Catalyst Counterion Effects*

2   We recently reported the improved activity and broad-spectrum solubility resulting from replacement

3   of the PF$_6$ counterion in catalyst **1a** with tetrakis[bis-3,5-trifluoromethylphenyl]borate, BArF, to give

4   complex **1d**.[18] Applying improved catalyst **1d** to the labelling of larger ester derivatives **10a-e** under

5   otherwise identical conditions, significant and more usable levels of deuterium incorporation were

6   observed across all examples (**Scheme 4**). Importantly, this counter-ion switch demonstrates an

7   alternative means by which ester labelling efficiency can be improved, should ambient temperature

8   conditions be required.

9   *2.4 Exploring Chemoselectivity Issues in Ester Labelling*

10   *2.4.1 Experimental Observations*

11   From the outset of our studies, it was clear that the main challenge in labelling aromatic esters would

12   be the weak coordinating ability of this functional group. To understand this issue in more detail, we

13   conducted a series of intramolecular competition studies where multiple potential directing groups can

14   compete for coordination (and subsequent C-H activation) at the iridium centre. To this end, we first

15   investigated the labelling of ethyl *p*-nitrobenzoate, **12**, under the optimised ambient reaction

16   conditions. Interestingly, we observed an approximate 1.4:1 selectivity for labelling *via* the nitro rather

17   than the ester directing group (**Scheme 5**). This chemoselectivity was eroded entirely on changing the

18   ester to a tertiary amide in **13** (1:1 nitro:amide), and reversed by replacing the ester with a ketone in **14**

19   (3:1 in favour of the ketone).
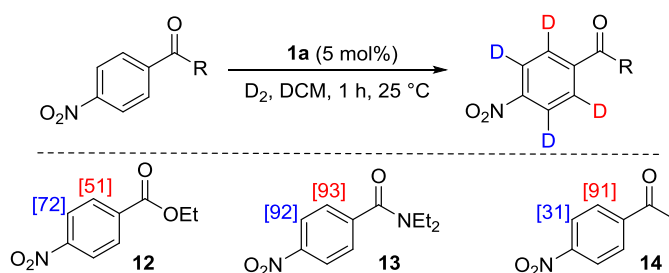
21   **Scheme 5**. Variation in labelling regioselectivity based on directing group chemoselectivity.

22

23   Focusing on the extreme substrate cases, with substrates **12** and **14**, 1 mol% of catalyst **1a** was

24   employed to allow reaction rates and labelling selectivities to be monitored over time (**Scheme 6**). In

25   the case of substrate **12**, and the labelling of the positions *ortho-* to the ester *vs* the nitro, the difference

26   in reaction rate, and thus product selectivity, remains largely constant throughout the course of the

27   reaction. Conversely, with substrate **14**, the relative rate of labelling *ortho-* to ketone *vs* nitro is higher

28   at lower conversions, and decreases rapidly over time.
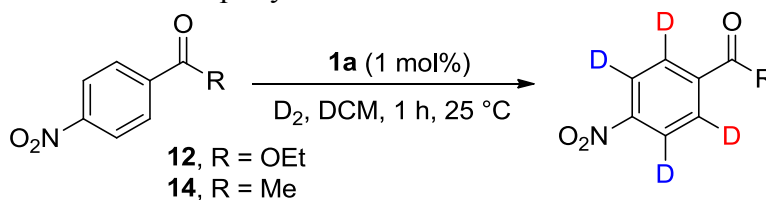
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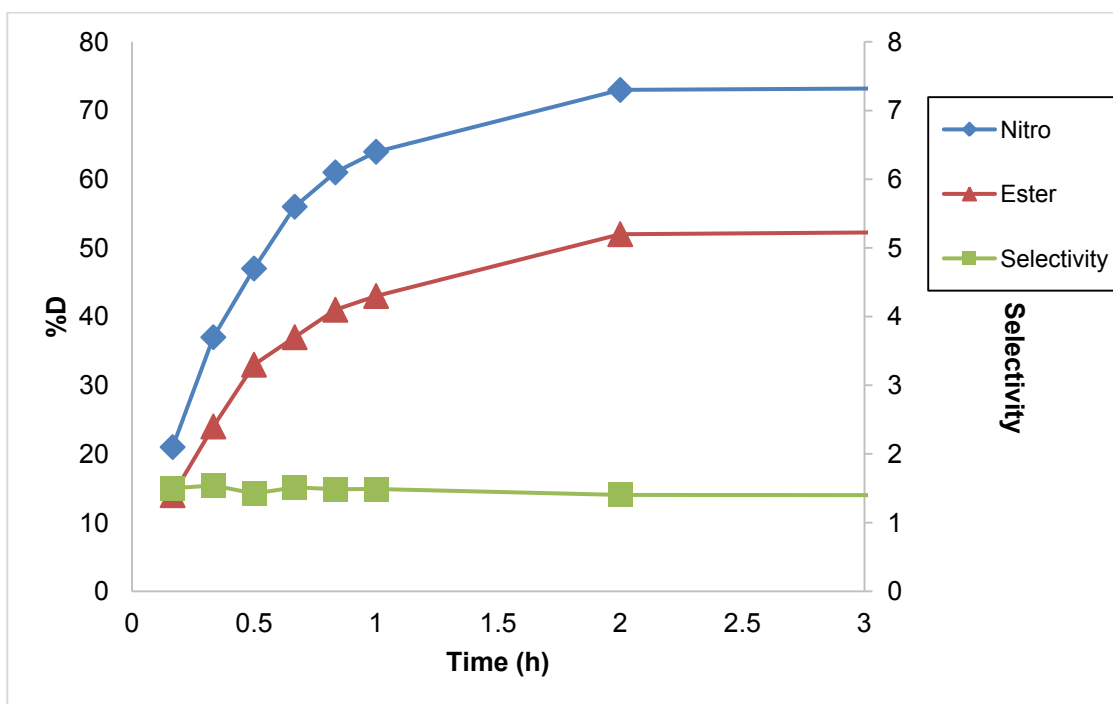
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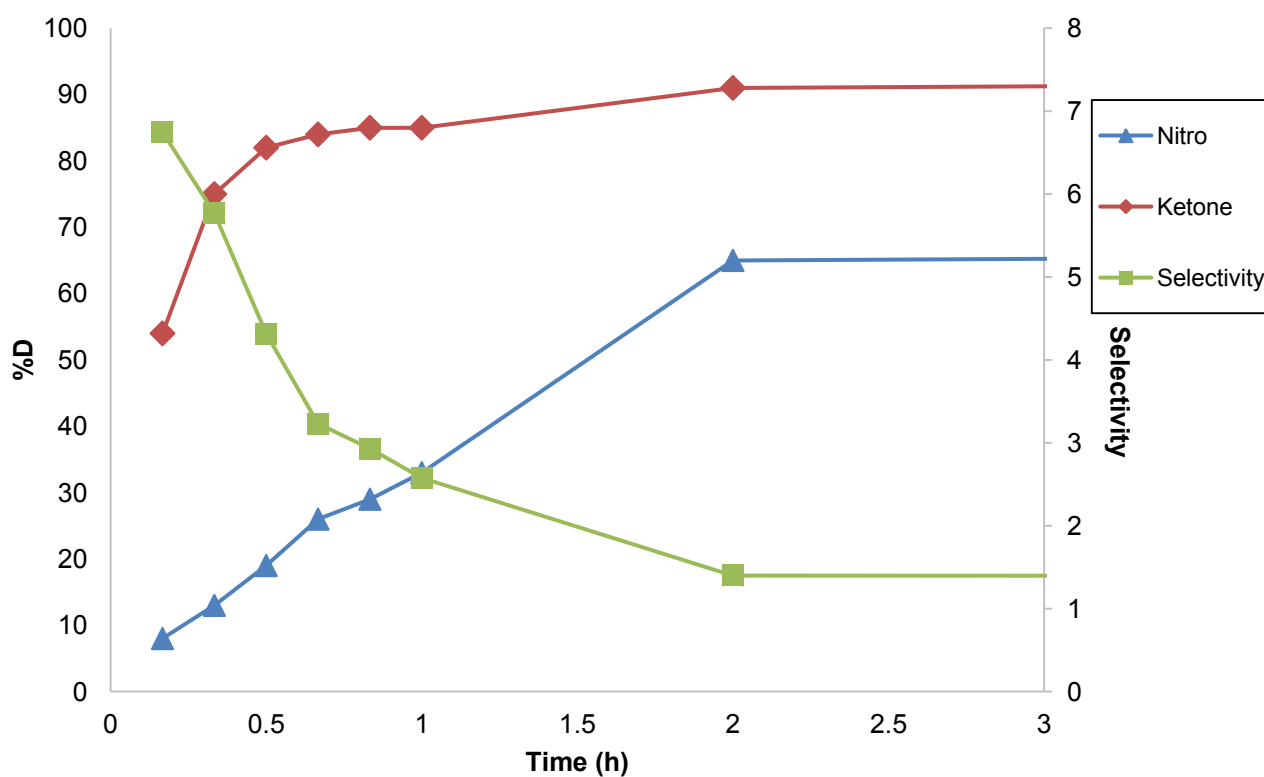
3
4   **Scheme 6**. Rate and product selectivity studies for **12** (top) and **14** (bottom).

5 *2.4.2 Theoretical Analysis*

6 In previous C-H activation studies, we rationalised observed directing group chemoselectivity using
7 DFT calculations to model the relative energies of the binding conformers and subsequent C-H
8 activation pathways.[20] We have now extended this approach to the analysis of the labelling reactions
9 of **12** and **14** (**Scheme 7**). In agreement with previous findings, we qualitatively predicted that the most

1 stable binding isomer should also be the most reactive. If Curtin-Hammett kinetics are assumed,[31]
2 the calculated $\Delta\Delta G^{\ddagger}$ (and thus product selectivity) from equilibrium and activation parameters is
3 predicted to be higher for the ketone in **14** *versus* the nitro group in **12** (5.5 *versus* 1.4 kcal/mol,
4 respectively). However, the current model does not account for the barrier to interconversion of
5 binding conformations (ketone to nitro, ester to nitro, and *vice versa* for each case). Considering these
6 points in the context of the experimentally-determined product selectivity *versus* time (*vide supra*),
7 only substrate **12** (showing little variation in selectivity over time) appears to show rapid equilibrium
8 between the binding isomers. Conversely, the labelling of **14** *via* the ketone may be interpreted as
9 being faster than the rate of interconversion between binding conformers *as well as* possessing a lower
10 barrier to C-H activation.
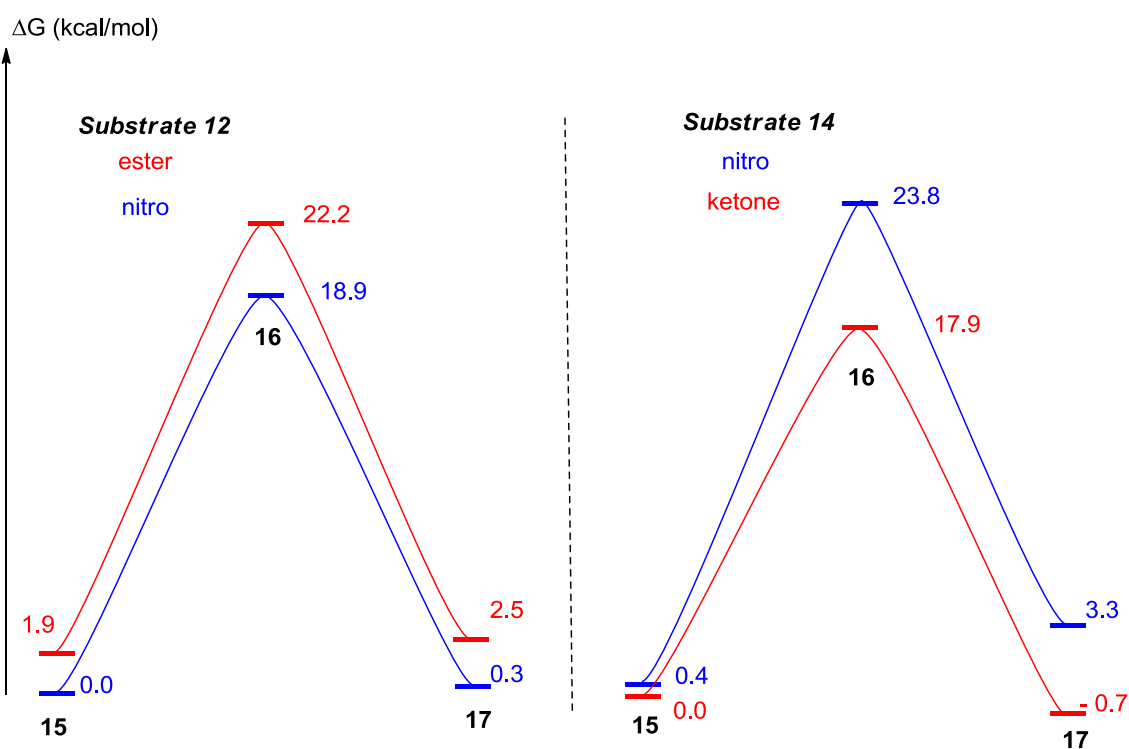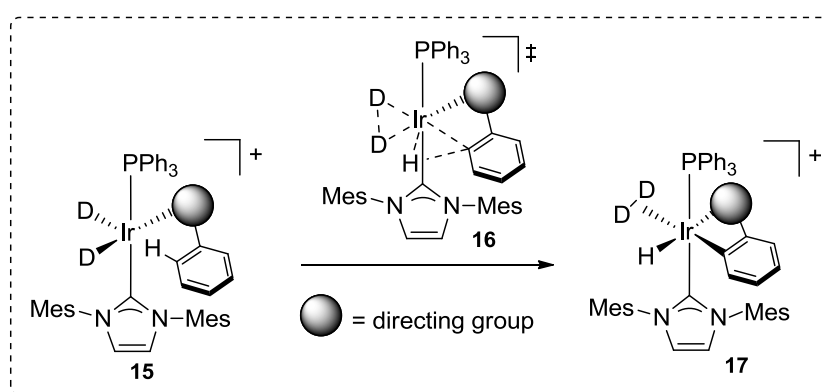
11   *Level of theory*: M06/6-31G* (Stuttgart basis set and ECP for Ir), gas phase

12   **Scheme 7**. DFT analyses on the C-H activation step in labelling substrates **12** and **14** with **1a**.

13 *2.4.3 Practical Exploitation of Directing Group Chemoselectivity*

1 The fundamental analysis of intramolecular directing group chemoselectivity served to show that
2 observed labelling patterns are, in part, dependent on the relative catalyst binding affinities of each
3 directing group. With this new understanding in hand, we questioned if it would be possible to control
4 the direction of labelling using the inherent reactivity of a given multi-functional substrate. Pleasingly,
5 using substrate **14** as a proof-of-concept substrate, minimal optimisation was required to show that
6 judicious choice of catalyst loading and reaction temperature allowed control of the labelling pattern
7 (**Scheme 8**). Specifically, labelling *ortho*- to the ketone group could be achieved with a 5 mol%
8 catalyst loading of **1a** at room temperature to give **18**, whereas the globally-labelled product **19** could
9 be obtained by employing 5 mol% of **1a** at 40 °C. In turn, the previously elusive nitro-selective
10 product, **20**, was accessed by a retro-labelling strategy (employing H_2 in place of D_2) conducted on the
11 globally-labelled product **19**.
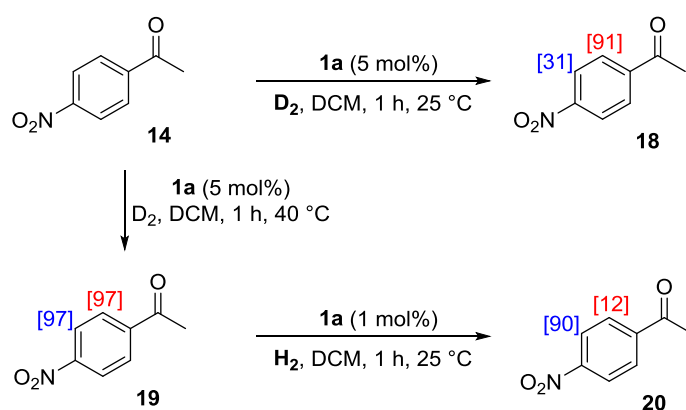
13 **Scheme 8**. Condition-dependent flexible access to alternatively deuterated forms of **18**.

14 *2.5 Conclusions*

15 In summary, we have divulged novel iridium-catalysed methods for the *ortho*-deuteration of benzoate
16 esters by the application of complexes emerging from our laboratory, possessing a bulky
17 NHC/phosphine combination. Inherent variability in reproducibly labelling ester substrates to useable
18 levels of D-incorporation was solved by two methods: (i) a mild increase in reaction temperature, and
19 (ii) a switch in the catalyst anion from PF_6 to BArF; this delivered good to excellent levels of
20 deuterium incorporation adjacent to ester directing groups. Kinetic studies on intramolecular directing
21 group chemoselectivity revealed that selectivity *versus* time is substrate dependent, showing the
22 possibility that different levels of binding conformer equilibria are possible. Supporting DFT analyses
23 of the systems studied experimentally support previous findings that suggested the most stable binding
24 conformer is also the most reactive. We have demonstrated that such knowledge can be exploited
25 experimentally and, as such, we have shown that different modes of regioselective labelling is possible
26 in a multifunctional substrate by simple variation of the reaction conditions. Overall, we believe that
27 these methods further enhance the applicable substrate scope and wider utility of the iridium
28 complexes at the centre of this study.

29 **3. Experimental Section**

1   *3.1 General Considerations*

2   All reagents were obtained from commercial suppliers (Aldrich, Alfa Aesar, or Strem) and used
3   without further purification, unless otherwise stated. Dichloromethane was obtained from a PureSolv
4   SPS-400-5 Solvent Purification System, and deoxygenated by bubbling argon through for a minimum
5   of ten minutes. Thin layer chromatography was carried out using Camlab silica plates coated with
6   fluorescent indicator UV$_{254}$, and were visualized using a Mineralight UVGL-25 lamp or developed
7   using vanillin solution. Catalysts **1a**,[20] **1b**,[16] and **1d**[18] were prepared according to literature
8   procedures. Esters **6c**,[32] **10a**,[33] **10b**,[34] **10c**,[35] **10d**,[36] **10e**,[37] and **13**[38] were prepared
9   according to the corresponding literature procedures. ^{1}H NMR spectra were recorded on a Bruker DPX
10 400 spectrometer at 400 MHz. Chemical shifts are reported in ppm and coupling constants are reported
11 in Hz. All coupling constants are $^{3}J_{H\text{-}H}$ unless otherwise stated.
12
13 *3.2 General Procedures*

14   *(A) Deuteration of Substrates Using Iridium(I) Complexes **1a**, **1b**, **1d** and **5***

15 A three-necked round bottom flask was fitted with two stopcock side arms and a rubber septum, and
16 then flame-dried. To this flask was added the iridium(I) complex and substrate. The solvent, DCM (2.5
17 mL, unless stated otherwise), was added, rinsing the inner walls of the flask, and the rubber septum
18 was replaced with a greased glass stopper. The solution was placed under an atmosphere of Ar and
19 stirred whilst being cooled to -78 °C in a dry ice/acetone bath. The flask was evacuated then refilled
20 with argon and this process repeated. Upon a third evacuation, an atmosphere of deuterium gas was
21 introduced to the flask. After sealing the flask, the cold bath was removed and the flask heated in an oil
22 bath to the desired temperature. The reaction mixture was stirred for the allotted reaction time before
23 removing the deuterium atmosphere and replacing with air. The resulting solution was washed with
24 DCM and transferred to a single-necked flask before removing the solvent under reduced pressure. The
25 catalyst was triturated from the remaining residue by addition of diethyl ether (3 × 5 mL). The solution
26 was filtered through a short plug of silica before the solvent was removed *in vacuo* to deliver the crude
27 product for analysis of the deuterium incorporation.
28
29 The level of deuterium incorporation in the substrate was determined by ^{1}H NMR spectroscopy. The
30 integrals were calibrated against a peak corresponding to a position not expected to be labelled.
31 **Equation 1** was then used to calculate the extent of labelling:
32
33 **Equation 1**

$$\% \, Deuteration = 100 - \left[\left(\frac{residual \; integral}{number \; of \; labelling \; sites}\right) x \; 100\right]$$

34 *Deuteration of Substrates for Rate Studies*
35 A three-necked round bottom flask fitted with one stopcock side arm and two rubber septa was flame-
36 dried. To this flask was added the iridium(I) complex, and substrate. The solvent, DCM (25 mL), was
37 added, rinsing the inner walls of the flask, and one rubber septum was replaced with a greased glass
38 stopper. The solution was placed under an atmosphere of argon and stirred whilst being cooled to -78
39 °C in a dry ice/acetone bath. The flask was evacuated then refilled with argon and this process

1   repeated. Upon a third evacuation, an atmosphere of deuterium gas was introduced to the flask via a

2   balloon. The balloon was left in place for the duration of the reaction to ensure a continuous supply of

3   deuterium. The cold bath was removed and the flask heated in an oil bath to the desired temperature.

4   The reaction mixture was then stirred for the allotted reaction time. An aliquot (1 mL) of the reaction

5   mixture was removed at intervals throughout the reaction (10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60 min, 2 h, and 18 h).

6   Each aliquot was transferred to a vial containing diethyl ether. After removal of solvent *in vacuo*, the

7   residue was analysed by ^{1}H NMR spectroscopy. The integrals were calibrated against a peak

8   corresponding to a position not expected to be labelled. The extent of labelling was determined using

9   **Equation 1**.

10

11   *3.3 Labelling Studies*

12

13   *3.3.1 Deuteration of ethyl benzoate **6a** with complex **5***

14
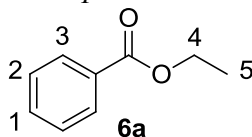
15   ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.05 (d, *J* = 7.1 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 7.54 (t, *J* = 7.3 Hz, 1H, CH^1), 7.43 (t, *J*

16   = 7.9 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 4.38 (q, *J* = 7.2 Hz, 2H, CH$_2^4$), 1.39 (t, *J* = 7.1 Hz, 3H, CH$_3^5$).

17   Incorporation expected at δ 8.05. Determined against integral at δ 1.39.

18   Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

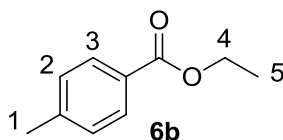19   c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

20

21   *Run 1*

22   a) **6a**, 0.032 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **5**, 8.04 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 17%

23

24   *Run 2*

25   a) **6a**, 0.032 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **5**, 8.04 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 22%

26   *3.3.2 Deuteration of ethyl 4-methylbenzoate **6b** with complex **5***

27

28   ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 7.91 (d, *J* = 8.0 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 7.21 (d, *J* = 7.9 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 4.34 (q, *J* =

29   7.1 Hz, 2H, CH$_2^4$), 2.38 (s, 3H, CH$_3^1$) 1.36 (t, *J* = 7.1 Hz, 3H, CH$_3^5$).

30   Incorporation expected at δ 7.91. Determined against integral at δ 2.38.

31   Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

32   c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

33   *Run 1*

34   a) **6b**, 0.035 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **5**, 8.04 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 36%
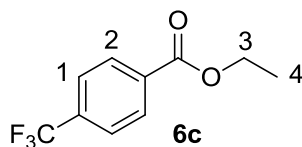
1   *Run 2*

2   a) **6b**, 0.035 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **5**, 8.04 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 41%
3

4   *3.3.3 Deuteration of ethyl 4-(trifluoromethyl)benzoate* **6c** *with complex* **5**
5

6
7

8   ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.12 (d, *J*= 8.3 Hz, 2H, CH[2]) 7.67(d, *J*= 8.3 Hz, 2H, CH[1]) 4.38 (q, *J*=
9   7.2 Hz, 2H, CH$_2$[3]), 1.38 (t, *J*= 7.2 Hz, 3H, CH$_3$[4]).
10

11 Incorporation expected at δ 8.12. Determined against integral at δ 1.38.
12

13 Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,
14 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.
15

16 *Run 1*
17 a) **6c**, 0.044 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **5**, 8.04 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 8%
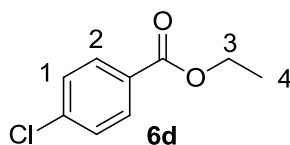18

19 *Run 2*
20 a) **6c**, 0.044 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **5**, 8.04 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 11%
21

22 *3.3.4 Deuteration of ethyl 4-chlorobenzoate* **6d** *with complex* **5**
23

24
25

26 ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 7.95 (d, *J*= 8.8 Hz, 2H, CH[2]) 7.38 (d, *J*= 8.8 Hz, 2H, CH[1]) 4.34 (q, *J*=
27 7.3 Hz, 2H, CH$_2$[3]), 1.36 (t, *J*= 7.3 Hz, CH$_3$[4]).
28

29 Incorporation expected at δ 7.95. Determined against integral at δ 1.36.
30

31 Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,
32 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.
33

34 *Run 1*
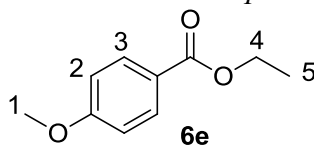35 a) **6d**, 0.039 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **5**, 8.04 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 50%
36

37 *Run 2*

1   a) **6d**, 0.039 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **5**, 8.04 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 59%

2

3   *3.3.5 Deuteration of ethyl 4-methoxybenzoate **6e** with complex **5***

4

5

6   ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 7.98 (d, *J*= 9.1 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 6.89 (d, *J*= 9.0 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 4.30 (q, *J*=

7   7.0 Hz, 2H, CH$_2$^{4}), 3.83 (s, 3H, CH$_3$^{1}), 1.35 (t, 7.1Hz, 3H, CH$_3$^{5}).

8

9   Incorporation expected at δ 7.98. Determined against integral at δ 3.83.

10

11 Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

12 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

13

14 *Run 1*

15 a) **6e**, 0.038 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **5**, 8.04 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 89%

16

17 *Run 2*

18 a) **6e**, 0.038 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **5**, 8.04 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 71%

19

20 *3.3.6 Deuteration of esters **6a-e** using catalysts **1b** and **1a***

21

22 For the results relating to catalysts **1b** and **1a** in Scheme 2, please refer to the spectroscopic data from

23 *Sections 3.3.1-3.3.5* for the analysis of the deuterated esters **6a-e**. As catalyst type and amount used are

24 the only variables changed, *General Procedure A* was followed with the results tabulated below:

25

Entry	Substrate	Catalyst	%D (run 1)	%D (run 2)
1	**6a**		10	10
2	**6b**		15	23
3	**6c**	**1b** (10.5 mg)	62	50
4	**6d**		85	93
5	**6e**		65	59
6	**6a**		6	40
7	**6b**		53	83
8	**6c**	**1a** (10.1 mg)	74	79
9	**6d**		95	95
10	**6e**		96	96

26

27 *3.3.7 Deuteration of methyl benzoate **8a** with complex **1a***

8a
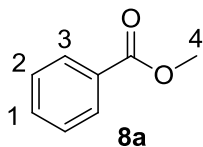
^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.04 (d, *J*= 7.0 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 7.56 (t, *J*= 7.4 Hz, 1H, CH^1), 7.44 (t, *J*= 7.9 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 3.92 (s, 3H, CH$_3^4$).

Incorporation expected at δ 8.04. Determined against integral at δ 3.92.

Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst, c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

Run 1
a) **8a**, 0.032 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 52%

Run 2
a) **8a**, 0.032 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 51%

3.3.8 Deuteration of methyl 4-methylbenzoate **8b** *with complex* **1a**

8b

^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 7.99 (d, *J*= 8.0 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 7.21 (d, *J*= 8.0 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 3.89 (s, 3H, CH$_3^4$), 2.39 (s, 3H, CH$_3^1$).

Incorporation expected at δ 7.99. Determined against integral at δ 2.39.

Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst, c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.
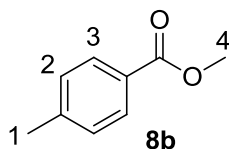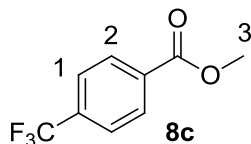
Run 1
a) **8b**, 0.035 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a,** 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 35%

Run 2
a) **8b**, 0.035 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 48%

3.3.9 Deuteration of methyl 4-(trifluoromethyl)benzoate **8c** *with complex* **1a**

1 ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.14 (d, *J*= 8.8 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 7.70 (d, *J*= 8.8 Hz, 2H, CH^1), 3.94 (s,
3 3H, CH$_3$^{3}).

4 Incorporation expected at δ 8.14. Determined against integral at δ 3.94.

6 Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,
7 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

9 *Run 1*
10 a) **8c**, 0.044 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 27%

12 *Run 2*
13 a) **8c**, 0.044 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 36%

15 *3.3.10 Deuteration of methyl 4-chlorobenzoate **8d** with complex **1a***
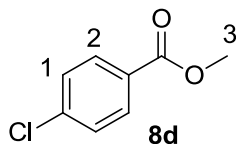
19 ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 7.93 (d, *J*= 8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 7.36 (d, *J*= 8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^1), 3.90 (s,
20 3H, CH$_3$^{3}).

22 Incorporation expected at δ 7.93. Determined against integral at δ 3.90.

24 Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,
25 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

27 *Run 1*
28 a) **8d**, 0.039 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 91%

30 *Run 2*
31 a) **8d**, 0.039 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 94%

33 *3.3.11 Deuteration of methyl 4-methoxybenzoate **8e** with complex **1a***

8e

1

2

3   ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 7.96 (d, *J*= 9.0 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 6.89 (d, *J*= 9.0 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 3.85 (s,

4   3H, CH$_3^4$), 3.82 (s, 3H, CH$_3^1$).

5

6   Incorporation expected at δ 7.96. Determined against integral at δ 3.82.

7   Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

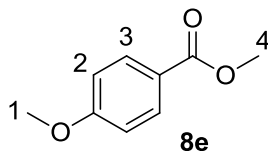8   c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

9

10   *Run 1*

11   a) **8e**, 0.038 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 87%

12

13   *Run 2*

14   a) **8e**, 0.038 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 90%

15

16   *3.3.12 Deuteration of n-propyl 4-methoxybenzoate **10a** with complex **1a***

17

10a

18

19

20   ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.00 (d, *J*=9.2 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 6.92 (d, *J*=9.2 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 4.25 (t,

21   *J*=6.8 Hz, 2H, CH^4), 3.86 (s, 3H, CH$_3^1$), 1.82-1.73 (m, 2H, CH$_2^5$), 1.02 (t, *J*=7.3 Hz, 3H, CH$_3^6$).

22

23   Incorporation expected at δ 8.00. Determined against integral at δ 3.86.

24

25   Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

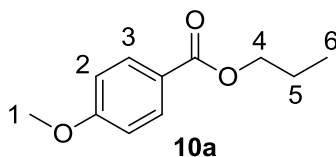26   c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

27

28   *Run 1*

29   a) **10a**, 0.042 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.9 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 28%

30

31   *Run 2*

32   a) **10a**, 0.038 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.9 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 27%

33

34   *3.3.13 Deuteration of 2,2,2-trifluoroethyl 4-methoxybenzoate **10b** with complex **1a***

35

10b

^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.06 (d, *J*=9.3 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 6.97 (d, *J*=9.3 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 4.69 (q, $^3J_{\text{H-F}}$=8.5 Hz, 2H, CH$_2$^{4}), 3.90 (s, 3H, CH$_3$^{1}).

Incorporation expected at δ 8.06. Determined against integral at δ 3.90.

Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst, c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.
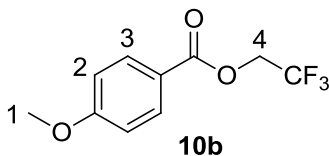
Run 1

a) **10b**, 0.050 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.9 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 9%

Run 2

a) **10b**, 0.050 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.9 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 7%

*3.3.14 Deuteration of t-butyl 4-methoxybenzoate **10c** with complex **1a***

10c

^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 7.94 (d, *J*=8.7 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 6.89 (d, *J*=8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 3.85 (s, 3H, CH$_3$^{1}), 1.58 (s, 9H, CH$_3$^{4}).

Incorporation expected at δ 7.94. Determined against integral at δ 3.85.

Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst, c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.
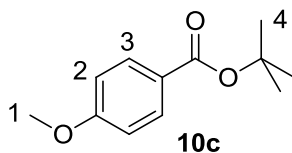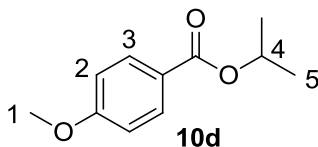
Run 1

a) **10c**, 0.045 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.9 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 10%

Run 2

a) **10c**, 0.045 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.9 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 9%

*3.3.15 Deuteration of iso-propyl 4-methoxybenzoate **10d** with complex **1a***

10d

1

2

3 ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 7.97 (d, *J*=9.0 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 6.89 (d, *J*=9.0 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 5.20 (septet,

4 *J*=6.3 Hz, 1H, CH^4), 3.84 (s, 3H, CH$_3^1$), 1.33 (d, *J*=6.5 Hz, 6H, CH$_3^5$).

5

6 Incorporation expected at δ 7.97. Determined against integral at δ 3.84.

7 Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

8 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

9

10 *Run 1*

11 a) **10d**, 0.042 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.9 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 79%

12

13 *Run 2*

14 a) **10d**, 0.042 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.9 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 66%

15

16

17 *3.3.16 Deuteration of benzyl 4-methoxybenzoate **10e** with complex **1a***

18

10e

19

20

21 ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.04 (d, *J*=9.0 Hz, 2H, CH^3), 7.45-7.43 (m, 2H, CH^5), 7.40-7.37 (m,

22 2H, CH^6), 7.35-7.32 (m, 1H, CH^7), 6.92 (d, *J*=9.0 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 5.34 (s, 2H, CH$_2^4$), 3.90 (s, 3H,

23 CH$_3^1$).

24

25 Incorporation expected at δ 8.04. Determined against integral at δ 3.90.

26

27 Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

28 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.
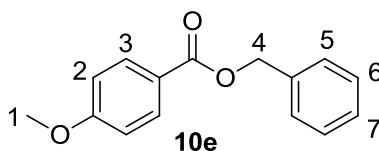
29

30 *Run 1*

31 a) **10e**, 0.052 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.9 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 73%

32

33 *Run 2*

34 a) **10e**, 0.052 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.9 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 51%

35

36 *3.4 Temperature Effects*

37

1   For the results relating to Scheme 3, readers are directed to the spectroscopic data in the relevant parts

2   of *Section 3.3* for the analysis of the corresponding deuterated esters **6a-c** and **8a-c**. As catalyst type

3   and amount used are the only variables changed, the remaining results are tabulated below. In all cases,

4   0.215 mmol of substrate was employed with 10.1 mg of catalyst **1a** (0.01 mmol, 5 mol%) and the

5   reactions run at 40 °C, otherwise following *General Procedure A*.

6

Entry	Substrate	%D (run 1)	%D (run 2)
1	**6a**	85	86
2	**6b**	89	91
3	**6c**	95	96
4	**8a**	75	76
5	**8b**	96	95
6	**8c**	92	93

7

8   *3.5 Catalyst Counterion Effects*

9

10   *3.5.1 Deuteration of n-propyl 4-methoxybenzoate **10a** with complex **1d***

11

12   Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

13   c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

14

15   a) **10a**, 0.042 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1d**, 18.6 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 89%

16

17   *3.5.2 Deuteration of 2,2,2-trifluoroethyl 4-methoxybenzoate **10b** with complex **1d***

18

19   Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

20   c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

21

22   a) **10b**, 0.050 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1d**, 18.6 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 24%

23   *3.5.3 Deuteration of t-butyl 4-methoxybenzoate **10c** with complex **1d***

24

25   Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

26   c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

27

28   a) **10c**, 0.045 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1d**, 18.6 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 41%

29

30   *3.5.4 Deuteration of iso-propyl 4-methoxybenzoate **10d** with complex **1d***

31

32   Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

33   c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

34

35   a) **10d**, 0.042 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1d**, 18.6 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 94%

36

1 *3.5.5 Deuteration of benzyl 4-methoxybenzoate **10e** with complex **1d***

2

3 Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

4 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation.

5 a) **10e**, 0.052 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1d**, 18.6 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 89%
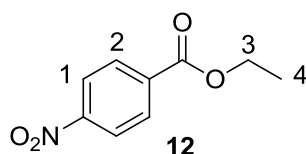
6

7 *3.6 Chemoselectivity Studies*

8

9 *3.6.1 Deuteration of ethyl 4-nitrobenzoate **12** with complex **1a***

10

11

12

13 ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.27 (d, *J*= 9.0 Hz, 2H, CH^1), 8.19 (d, *J*= 8.3 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 4.42 (q, *J*=

14 7.5 Hz, 2H, CH$_2$^{3}), 1.41 (t, *J*= 7.5 Hz, 3H, CH$_3$^{4}).

15

16 Incorporation expected at δ 8.27 and 8.19. Determined against integral at δ 1.41.

17

18 Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

19 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation at position 1 and position 2

20

21 *Run 1*

22 a) **12**, 0.042 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 1: 72%, 2: 49%
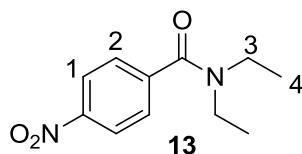
23

24 *Run 2*

25 a) **12**, 0.042 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 1: 72%, 2: 52%

26

27 *3.6.2 Deuteration of N,N-diethyl 4-nitrobenzamide **13** with complex **1a***

28

29

30

31 ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.28 (d, *J*= 8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^1), 7.57 (d, *J*= 8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 3.17-3.53

32 (m, 4H, CH$_2$^{3}), 1.25 (br s, 6H, CH$_3$^{4}).

33

34 Incorporation expected at δ 8.28 and 7.57. Determined against integral at δ 1.25.

35

1   Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

2   c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation at position 1 and position 2
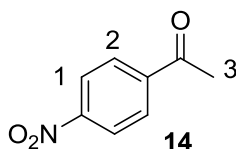
3

4   *Run1*

5   a) **13**, 0.047 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 1: 89%, 2: 93%

6

7   *Run 2*

8   a) **13**, 0.047 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 1: 94%, 2: 93%

9

10   *3.6.3 Deuteration of 4-nitroacetophenone **14** with complex **1a***

11

12

13

14   ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.32 (d, *J*= 8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^1), 8.11 (d, *J*= 8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 2.69 (s,

15   1H, CH$_3^3$).

16

17   Incorporation expected at δ 8.32 and 8.11. Determined against integral at δ 2.69.

18

19   Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

20   c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation at position 1 and position 2

21

22   *Run1*

23   a) **14**, 0.0467 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 1: 28%, 2: 97%

24

25   *Run 2*

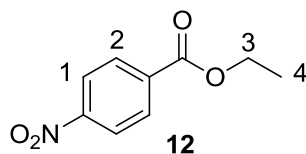26   a) **14**, 0.0467 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 1: 33%, 2: 85%

27

28   *3.7 Rate Studies*

29

30   *3.7.1 Deuteration of ethyl 4-nitrobenzoate **12** with complex **1a***

31

32

33

34   ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.27 (d, *J*= 9.0 Hz, 2H, CH^1), 8.19 (d, *J*= 8.3 Hz, 2H, CH^2). 4.42 (q, *J*=

35   7.5 Hz, 2H, CH$_2^3$), 1.41 (t, *J*= 7.5 Hz, 3H, CH$_3^4$).

36

1 Incorporation expected at 1: δ 8.27 and 2: δ 8.19. Determined against integral at δ 1.41.

2

3 Following *General Procedure B*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

4 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation at position 1 and 2 at each time

5 interval

6

7 *Labelling at Position 1*

8 a) **12**, 0.399 g, 2.15 mmol, b) **1a**, 2.17 mg, 0.0215 mmol, c) 18 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 21% (10 mins), 37%

9 (20 mins), 47% (30 mins), 56% (40 mins), 61% (50 mins), 64% (1 h), 73% (2 h), and 76% (18 h).
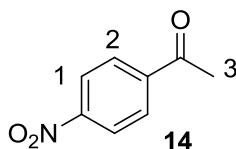
10

11 *Labelling at Position 2*

12 a) **12**, 0.399 g, 2.15 mmol, b) **1a**, 2.17 mg, 0.0215 mmol, c) 18 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 2: 14% (10 mins),

13 24% (20 mins), 33% (30 mins), 37% (40 mins), 41% (50 mins), 43% (1 h), 52% (2 h), and 56% (18 h).

14 *3.7.2 Deuteration of 4-nitroacetophenone 14 with complex 1a*

15

16

17

18 ^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.32 (d, *J*= 8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^1), 8.11 (d, *J*= 8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 2.69 (s,

19 1H, CH$_3$^{3})

20 Incorporation expected at δ 8.32 and 8.11. Determined against integral at δ 2.69.

21

22 Following *General Procedure B*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst,

23 c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation at position 1 and 2 at each time

24 interval.

25

26 *Labelling at Position 1*

27 a) **14**, 0.355 g, 2.15 mmol, b) **1a**, 2.12 mg, 0.021 mmol, c) 18 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 8% (10 mins), 13%

28 (20 mins), 19% (30 mins), 26%(40 mins), 29% (50 mins), 33% (1 h), 65% (2 h), 69% (18 h).

29

30 *Labelling at Position 2*

31 a) **14**, 0.0467 g, 2.15 mmol, b) **1a**, 2.12 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 18 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 54% (10 mins), 75%

32 (20 mins), 82% (30 mins), 84% (40 mins), 85% (50 mins), 85% (1 h), 91% (2 h), 95% (18 h).
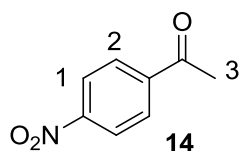
33

34 *3.8 Practical Exploitation of Directing Group Chemoselectivity*

35

36 *3.8.1 Deuteration of 4-nitroacetophenone 14 with complex 1a*

37

^{1}H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl$_3$): δ 8.32 (d, *J*= 8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^1), 8.11 (d, *J*= 8.9 Hz, 2H, CH^2), 2.69 (s, 1H, CH$_3$^{3}).

Incorporation expected at δ 8.32 and 8.11. Determined against integral at δ 2.69.

See the details within section 3.6.3.

3.8.2 Deuteration of 4-nitroacetophenone 14 with complex 1a

Following *General Procedure A*, results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst, c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation at position 1 and position 2.

a) **14**, 0.035 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 10.1 mg, 0.01 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 40 °C, and e) 1: 97%, 2: 97%

3.8.3 Hydrogenation of 4-nitroacetophenone-d$_4$ 19 with complex 1a

Following *General Procedure A* (deuterium gas was replaced with hydrogen gas), results are reported as a) amount of substrate, b) amount of catalyst, c) reaction time, d) reaction temperature, and e) level of incorporation of deuterium at position 1 and position 2.

a) **19**, 0.0363 g, 0.215 mmol, b) **1a**, 2.1 mg, 0.0021 mmol, c) 1 h, d) 25 °C, and e) 1: 90%, 2: 12 %

4. Computational Details

Density functional theory (DFT) [39] was employed to calculate the gas-phase electronic structures and energies for all species involved in H/D exchange reactions. All structures have been optimised with the hybrid meta-GGA exchange correlation functional M06.[40] The M06 density functional was used in conjunction with the 6-31G(*d*) basis set for main group non-metal atoms and the Stuttgart RSC[41] effective core potential along with the associated basis set for Ir. The participating transition states (TS) are located at the same level of theory. Harmonic vibrational frequencies are calculated at the same level of theory to characterize respective minima (reactants, intermediates, and products with no imaginary frequency) and first order saddle points (TSs with one imaginary frequency). The validity of using the 6-31G(d) basis set has previously been checked by comparative single point energy calculations employing the def2-TZVP basis set for all atoms on similar H/D exchange systems.[20] All calculations using the M06 functional have been performed using Gaussian 09 quantum chemistry program package (version A.02). Calculations were first carried out in the gas phase before reoptimising each structure at the same level of theory, implementing the Polarizable Continuum Model (PCM) for DCM as the solvent.[42] All coordinates provided are listed in Cartesian

format, with charge and multiplicity of each system given at the top of the coordinate list (i.e. 0 1 = neutral singlet; 1 1 = 1+ charged singlet).

Acknowledgments

Author Contributions

The project was devised by W.J.K. and M.R. Experimental results were obtained by J.D. and T.J.D.M. Computational analysis was conducted by M.R. with consultation from T.T. The manuscript was prepared by D.M.L., M.R., and W.J.K.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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