Bag Check Code of Practice (Museum Version)

An advisory code of practice for the checking of bags and personal items within museum environments

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Foreword

Museums conduct bag checks to help protect collections, buildings, staff, and visitors. While this practice can be necessary for security and preservation reasons, it must also respect the privacy of visitors and be carried out with minimal intrusion.

This Code has been adapted for museum use to reflect the needs of cultural institutions and their visitors. Its purpose is to outline clear principles and practices so that everyone understands their rights and responsibilities.

Many of these principles rely on providing clear information to visitors. Although not all conflicts can be avoided, this Code sets out procedures for managing issues when they arise.

The principles within this Code are divided into:

- **Legal obligations** that must be complied with
- **Agreed visitor service principles** reflecting best practice**-service principles**
- **Suggested procedures** for implementing these principles respectfully and effectively

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Museum's Right to Conduct Bag Checks

Legal Position

When a visitor enters a museum, they do so under a licence. The museum may make entry conditional upon presenting bags, parcels, and other items for inspection.

If additional conditions apply (e.g., large items, food, or liquids not permitted in collection areas), these must be stated as a condition of entry.

Agreed Principles

- Personal handbags will not be checked unless they are **larger than A4 size (210 × 297 mm)** or staff have reasonable grounds to believe the bag contains prohibited items or items that may harm the museum's collection or facilities.
- All other bags, parcels, backpacks, containers, and prams that could reasonably conceal restricted or prohibited items may be checked.

Suggested Practices

Signage at entrances should clearly state:

"This museum operates a bag-check policy for the protection of our collections, visitors, and buildings.
Entry to the museum is conditional on presenting bags, parcels, containers, and prams for inspection if requested by museum staff."

Notifying Visitors of Bag-Check Policy

Legal Position

If bag checks are conducted, visitors must be informed **before entering** the museum.
Signage must be clear, visible, and placed where visitors cannot miss it.

Entering the museum after seeing such signage implies the visitor has accepted these conditions.

Agreed Principles

- Entry-condition signage must be **highly visible, clear, and easy to understand**.
- Signs must state:
    - Visitors agree to a bag check upon entry
    - Checks apply to bags, parcels, backpacks, containers, and prams
- Supplementary signage should clarify the museum's commitment to respectful and limited intrusion.
- Visitor information leaflets should also include these conditions.

Suggested Practices

To avoid disputes:

- Ensure signage refers to the museum's bag-check policy
- Consider translated versions in culturally diverse communities
- Display notices prominently at entrances and provide printed copies upon request

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Procedures for Conducting Bag Checks

Legal Position

Bag checks are **voluntary** and may only be conducted with the visitor's consent.
Forcing a bag check can constitute assault.

Agreed Principles

- Requests for bag checks must be **polite, confident, and respectful**.
- Checks should be minimally intrusive.
- Visitors should always **open their own bags**.
  Staff must never touch personal items or reach inside bags.
- If contents obstruct visibility, staff may ask visitors to move items to allow a clear view.

Dispute Procedures

Legal Position

Visitors may refuse a bag check.
In this case, the museum may ask the visitor to leave and not re-enter unless they comply with entry conditions.

Forcibly searching a bag or restraining a visitor may constitute assault or false imprisonment unless the visitor has clearly committed an offence.

Agreed Principles

- Staff should **never escalate disputes** or argue with visitors.
- Staff must **never physically restrain a visitor** or touch their bags.
- If a dispute arises, staff should call a **manager or duty officer** immediately.
- The manager will explain the conditions of entry.
  If the visitor still refuses, they may be asked to leave.
- If the visitor refuses to leave, staff may contact **police or security services**.

Staff Training

Legal Position

All staff involved in the process must be informed of the Code.

Suggested Practices

Depending on the museum's size, training could include:

- Induction sessions
- Regular training workshops
- Internal updates or guidance documents
- Posting the Code on staff noticeboards
- Making copies available to all staff