

Episode 8 – EXPLOITATION AND COMPENSATION

- Buffy Gorrilla: This is Starting Somewhere - a podcast from the University of Melbourne all about internships - finding one, landing it, and making the most of the experience. I'm Buffy Gorrilla, my first job was babysitting for \$2 an hour and now I'm paid a fair wage to be host of this podcast.
- Ben Pawson: And I'm Ben Pawson, I sold double glazing over the telephone, for a week. I generated 6,000 pounds in sales and got 30 pounds for my troubles - and now I'm co-host of this podcast.
- Buffy: So, we're clearly the best people to help you start somewhere.
- Amalia Illgner: I'm walking upstairs on a beautiful Saturday afternoon doing extra work for no money, and where I completely fell out of love with the internship.
- Buffy: This is the episode where we look at the dark side of internships, we explore the risks of bad experiences, and look at compensation.
- Ben: And if this puts you off internships, in the next episode of Starting Somewhere, we'll look at some alternatives.
- Buffy: We hear from some great people, we could just sit back and let some of these interviews roll, but that's not our style. In episode one we said...
- "Ben and I are here to be your intern guides, and for lack of a less cheesy word, help you along your journey".
- This episode is the movie-montage sequence of you walking into a mysterious abandoned house. It helps if you are not alone, and you have a pal. Ben and I are those pals, we'll help protect you.
- Ben: Speaking of mysterious, we tracked down the person who runs the Dodgy Internships Australia Twitter feed. They'll share ads for what are probably law breaking internships.
- Buffy: Yep, that's right, we are getting serious, finally!
Amalia Illgner from the UK is suing the company she interned with for unpaid wages – she tells us why.
- Ben: And Jack Kenchington-Evans of Internships Australia tells us how confronting exploitation can be 'a bit of a barbecue stopper'.
- Ben: How should I address you?

Dodgy Internship: I don't know.

Ben: Dodgy?

Dodgy: Dodgy. I do have people who email me like "Dear Dodgy", I'm like "okay". I just don't want to say my name because partially selfish reasons. I don't want people to Google my name, and the first thing that comes up is like "oh this is the girl who calls out bad employers". That's not really what I want. But then also because I just want this platform to be about advocating for things not all about me, me, me. Yes I've done a dodgy internship in the past, but so have a lot of people. So to answer your question, how do you address me? Maybe just Dodgy.

I am the creator of the Twitter account, Dodgy Internship, or Dodgy Internships Australia. I created the account as a way to call-out internships I see advertised online that don't correlate with fair work legislation around unpaid work.

Buffy: For example?

Dodgy: Wedding blog, Pears and Pastels, are looking for remote unpaid writers and calling it an internship. That's the whole tweet.

Ben: The law around internships is complicated, so complicated that we had to go and find an expert.

Jack Kenchington-Evans: My name's Jack Kenchington-Evans. I'm a Director of Interns Australia.

Buffy: What exactly is Interns Australia?

Jack: Interns Australia is the support and advocacy group for fair internships in this country. We've been around for just over five years, and in that time we have lobbied governments, we've written submissions, we've run surveys, we've actively participated in specific actions against particular employers, dodgy internship providers, and we try and raise awareness of this issue through media, seminars, a whole range of activities to try and raise the profile of unfair internships, and try and make some change.

Ben: So defining the law is pretty simple, except when you come to internships for credit, or vocational placements.

Jack: We have, as our leading policy goal, compliance with the law. There's some complexities in advocating around unpaid, but credited, internships because

they are, as you may be familiar, the major exception to paid employment in Australia. So, most employees need to be paid per the industry award, which is the minimum standards of wages and conditions, except if you're on what's called a 'vocational placement'. These people who receive course credit are on a vocational placement. They don't need to be paid. It's a conundrum.

They fall within, for example, the youth allowance social security net. If they're a domestic student completing that, they might be getting, already, some money. If they're an international student, of course, that's not the case, but there's a lawfulness there, but it is on our radar for a few other reasons.

There is minimal oversight over what a vocational placement is, and it's being tested in the courts as we speak. There's a young man who's working with the Young Workers Centre, who is bringing NAB and Swinburne into the courts for his year-long internship, where he alleges he was underpaid \$16,000 because he received a non-legal wage, which the university and the bank characterised as some sort of stipend. He's saying, "That's a sham, I was actually an employee."

Now, one of the challenges in these sorts of cases is: what is a vocational placement? You do get these absurd situations where there might be a six credit point summer subject that lasts two weeks, but the internship associated with it might last eight months. Now the court's being invited, in this case, to test if there's some sort of proportionality, some sort of reasonable limitation, and we'll see how that plays out.

Buffy: If it's for credit it should be about learning, not just an intern doing the work of a real employee. And it's the responsibility of universities and employers in setting up vocational placements or internships for credit to ensure that is the case.

Ben: It's in the self-sourced internships where the real exploitation is more likely to happen.

Buffy: And we have spoken to people who have done less than beneficial internships.

Ben: Like Alex Alvaro, who did an intern diary we've been featuring during her internship at The Age, which was for credit, and sounded great. This experience however...

Alex Alvaro: I did do an internship during my Bachelor's. It wasn't a very good one compared to the one I just did. I don't know, people talk about doing grunt work, I think it was a lot of that.

Buffy: Where was that?

Alex: I won't say where it was. It was a well-known, online publication and while it was a useful experience, I think there's definitely grounds for saying there might have been some exploitation there, and that's definitely the experience I've heard from a lot of other people who have interned there.

Buffy: So tell me a little bit about your day to day in the internship that you feel that you were exploited at.

Alex: I would get in, and a lot of the role was doing web uploads, so I'd get an article sent to me from one of the editors, and she would just say, "Work some photos into this. Do the SEO for the article, and put some links in so it links to other articles on the site and then send it back", and that was most of my day, like cropping photos, putting links into articles. While it was quite busy, like I was doing a lot of them per day, I feel like they were getting more out of me being there than I was. I mean, it was a three month internship and I was there once a week, one full day a week, unpaid.

Buffy: Was that through your undergraduate course?

Alex: No, it wasn't, I just applied.

Buffy: And was it a rigorous application process for that internship?

Alex: I don't think it was rigorous. I had initially applied for a different type of internship there, and they kind of slotted me into that one. Just one interview.

Buffy: Did they ask you to crop photos in that?

Alex: Not in the interview, no. I had no idea that's what I'd be doing, but I felt useful, but it was quite a long time to be there.

Buffy: How have you marketed that experience on your CV or in LinkedIn to kind of sell what you were responsible for?

Alex: I guess there's not much you can say, I mean I market it as an editorial internship. I say that I learned about SEO and a lot about being in that fast-paced, online media environment, so I think that's kind of how I get around not having done that much during that time.

Buffy: Some of these opportunities are easy to spot. Here's Dodgy again.

Dodgy: Football coach, Luke O'Shannessy, is advertising an unpaid internship requiring a minimum three years AFL coaching experience, a level one AFL coach accreditation and someone who is undertaking or has completed a Bachelor of Education. Intern will plan and develop training sessions.

Ben: Sounds like a professional job to me.

Indeed. Some however are more subtle. They might look good but not turn out well. Dodgy has been sifting through ads for a while and breaks it down for us. Take back the power!

Dodgy: Look, it's honestly a pretty quick process of how I figure out whether something's dodgy. I basically go on a job website, whether it's Pedestrian, Seek, Indeed, Scout, there's so many. And I just type in internship, and then I look up what's happening and I go to each one and then I look through and I go, "Okay, does it have the statement 'we will work with your university,' or 'this internship can be accredited to a relevant course.'" And if it doesn't say that statement, then I look a bit closer at how long it's running, I might Google the company, see how long the company's been running, I might look on their LinkedIn, see how many interns are currently working for them on LinkedIn.

The information's out there. I think it's easy to just look at the ad and not anything else, but you know, you have a right. You're going to be working for this company probably unpaid, you have a right to research them and see what it's really all about. Also another really great way to see if a company is good is to look at their company reviews on Glassdoor, or a website like that. They can be so telling.

There was one really bad internship programme that I'd been told about, and then I looked up the company on Glassdoor, and their reviews were scathing. And you know? And I can so see that an intern wouldn't necessarily know that that kind of resource is out there, but it is. Look at it and realise you're actually in quite a powerful position, you know? You don't owe anyone anything when you're working unpaid, so make sure you're choosing a company that's gonna align with your values and get you where you wanna go.

Basically step one: check if it's affiliated with a university course. You need to realise that you're gonna be working most likely unpaid so how much of your time can you really afford to give up? I personally don't think that internships should be more than one day a week, but a lot of them are. So I guess that's

something that you have to think about. You know, can I afford to not be working for two or three days a week? Can I fit that around my university schedule? Can I get there with the commute? All that kind of stuff is really important to think about. 'Cause you don't want it to, I guess, be a hindrance on anything else that you're doing. You still need to be able to eat and study and all that kind of thing. And then from there I think that interns shouldn't be afraid to send an email or a quick phone call. A lot of employers don't like phone calls though, so maybe just send them an email, and say, "I'm studying graphic design," or whatever it is, "I need to do an internship as part of our course. I just want to double check, how long does this run for? What are the kind of tasks I could be doing?" You know, it's a question. If they don't write back, then move on to the next one. There's a million of them out there.

My advice is just taking the power almost back into your own hands, and going, "I'm gonna choose the company that's gonna be really great for me. I'm gonna learn a lot, they're gonna respect me." Because when else do you get that choice? Once you're a bit older and you've got bills to pay, and maybe mouths to feed if you've children or whatever, you don't have that luxury. So I guess just embrace it.

Buffy: So should we avoid unpaid, not for credit internships all together? It's a tricky one, we've touched on it before, and it comes back to having a plan, or at least a short term goal you can benchmark any internship against.

Ben: We checked this with Glyn Davis, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne

Glyn Davis: From every point of view, a paid internship is better than an unpaid internship, but that's common sense. Everyone can see that. It would be silly, I think, to say that you should never do unpaid internships. It is true that you get opportunities that are absolutely worthwhile. I know people who've worked, for example, for The Conversation as an unpaid internship, and they got a huge amount out of it for a relatively short time. It was great. I know someone who worked, briefly, for Melbourne University Publishing. Same deal. They got a lot from it, and it helped them think about, is publishing the life that they want to pursue?

But there is an important point at which an unpaid opportunity becomes exploitation. We're very careful as a university, when we're recommending internships to be careful about not pushing people toward organisations that, sadly, do exploit. Students have to be careful about that. In a difficult job market, it's so easy for someone to offer you unpaid work on the grounds it somehow will help your career later. It may be true, but unless you're using it for reasons you fully understand: I'm testing this interest, I'm seeing whether I

like this sort of work, I'm seeing whether I have the skills. Unless you're going to get something very clear for yourself out of it, just be a bit wary.

Dodgy: What about this one? HCGA Pty Limited are seeking an unpaid intern, graduates included, with English and Mandarin skills to support their business development team. Intern tasks include connecting with partners and creating a social media campaign.

Ben: Again, sounds like a job.

Dodgy: Yeah, I love the ones that ask for two languages.

Ben: Yeah.

Dodgy: 'Cause you know, that's such a common skill in Australia, to be able to just whip out two languages. Sometimes we get three.

Ben: And if it is a job it should be paid, right?

Buffy: Do you pay your interns at NAB?

Rem Tzambazis: We do. All of our interns at NAB are paid. I can't speak for every industry, and every employer, but we fundamentally believe that an internship should be paid. We do work in some instances with some universities, and some students for other opportunities that we call vocational placements. That's the technical definition under the Fair Work, Act and those ones are unpaid, but there's very, very specific guidelines around those, and fundamentally they need to get official course credit as part of their studies for something like that.

Buffy: That was Rem Tzambasis, manager of strategic partners and programs at NAB bank. But how do some of the other organisation we've been speaking to compensate their interns?

Ben: Let me guess, is it a spectrum?

Tess, were either of the first two internships paid?

Tess : No, they were not paid.

Buffy: Now tell me about your internship compensation? Do you compensate your interns?

Dan Silver: Yup, absolutely, we believe strongly that we want everybody to feel valued and part of the team. So we do pay our interns, we pay them \$100 a day, and

also that we also provide some options in Stake the business itself, so after working here for a period of time. So, which we believe is a really good incentive. The reason we do that is we believe that all of our staff, all of our employees are critical for the success of the business and they should all have some equity and basically share in the upside of the business.

Buffy: That was Dan Silver, of Stake, a financial startup in Sydney.

Ben: So why do you pay your interns?

Pieta Spencer: Why do we pay our interns? Because they're doing work for us. I think it's so important that as an employer, you notice the contribution that they're giving to you, so I definitely think that there's valid reasons for them to be paid. They're producing solid work.

Buffy: That was Pieta Spencer of Shinewing Australia, a firm of accountants. We've heard from Charis Palmer, chief of staff for The Conversation, before. Here she expands on what The Conversation pays.

Charis Palmer: So, we pay a stipend of \$20 a day to cover people's public transport, and of course not everyone can work for free and that is something we're really mindful of. For example with interstate interns we cover their travel costs. We can't cover their accommodation, because we just don't have a budget for that. But we would say to them in the interview process, "do you have somewhere you can stay? Is that possible for you?" And kind of try to work with them and if they were to say no, we would say "okay look", we would probably find a way to pay for their accommodations if it were a 'go' or 'no-go' sort of decision. Thankfully that hasn't happened. Most people have friends or family in Melbourne that they can stay with.

In terms of the broader issue of paid internships and not paid, we are a non-profit and we work with the universities to kind of facilitate this experience. So, ultimately I think that the interns are quite willing to give their time. Does that mean that the ones who have full time jobs can't do it? Well again, one of the first things I say to them is "do you have a part time job? How many hours do you have to work?" We have a flexible workplace policy that applies to all of our staff, so that means working with the interns to work around the hours that work for them, and that kind of helps those people who have part time jobs to still earn a living and be able to do the internship.

Ben: But what about those people that don't have friends or family in Melbourne that they can stay with? Privilege - being able to work for free - is one of the biggest issues with unpaid internships. And, our next topic. Which will be

kicked off by Jack Kenchington-Evans, a lawyer and trade union official, and director of Interns Australia.

Buffy: Can a good internship be unfair?

Jack: It's a tricky question. There are definitely people who get a leg up by doing an internship that might just be a CV stuffer, and for those people, we're really conscious that they're going to have a terrible time, and they're going to get ripped off, and they're probably a few thousand dollars underpaid, and that's horrible. But what's worse, of course, is the people who don't get that internship, who don't get that leg up, who self-select out of it, and that's the single mum trying to pivot into a professional role. That's the kid from the rough postcode who can't afford not to pay rent. That's the indigenous kid from the sticks. How do you get into Sydney and work that six/eight week, six month, internship if you're not getting a wage? Now, that's got some very obvious social inequity issues attached to it. I think most Aussies get that intuitively.

One of the less obvious, but I think really important points to raise though, is what does it do for the composition of our labour market and the competitiveness of our industries? Australia has, by and large, a meritocratic professional labour market. We've got highly talented graduates who get a gig, historically, on the strength of their performance, rather than, say, their access to credit, or their family wealth.

Now, that's going to change, and it's changing rapidly in America, where unpaid work's a prerequisite for graduate work, and that's going to happen more and more in Australia. It's going to have intergenerational flow-ons, and the crisis for business is perhaps for their focus less about the social inequity, and more about the competitiveness of our industries.

If our workforce is there not through merit, but through access to credit, that's a problem, and that's uncompetitive, and it's not sustainable.

Ben: As a company would I even get to make the choice between intern A, who needs a living wage, might have to travel and can't start until the short term contract they are doing is up; versus intern B, who can stay with their parents, doesn't need the money, and can start tomorrow? How likely is it that Intern A would even be able to apply?

Buffy: Or is an internship even in the realm of possibility for them? Anna Lemcke works for MVLLLEN, and she explains what all those letters mean, and how they are trying to help:

Anna Lemcke: The Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Networks, or MMVLLLEN, we're creating positive futures for local young people by bringing education, industry, and the community together. Basically, we're a place-based organisation, so you will find 31 Local Learning and Employment Networks across Victoria, but what you will find is that each of us work in quite a different way.

Our job is obviously because we're a place-based organisation to fill gaps. So in our area traditionally we have a really high youth unemployment rate. A lot of the other LLENs focus on more in-school activities, but our LLEN has a really strong focus on out-of-school activities so those are the young people experiencing unemployment and high levels of marginalisation. We are situated between a lot of the housing estates here, so work with a lot of young people of migrant and refugee background, young people that have experienced intergenerational poverty, young people that-

Ben: What does that mean, intergenerational poverty?

Anna: Intergenerational poverty means that a young person comes from a household where unemployment has persisted for generations. So that means a young person has never experienced anyone in their close family or surroundings who's actually working. So intergenerational poverty means that the young person in this context is used to being surrounded by people on welfare and that could start with the grandparents. So that means those young people don't have the role models or someone that can help them through that process into gaining employment.

So we run an internship programme where we link young people with an employer for 10 weeks, one to two days per week, and those young people are also linked with a mentor of professional background for nine months. So there are lots of young people that are highly capable, highly skilled, have amazing communication skills, but they are discriminated in the workplace. Just because they're young.

An internship, like any other volunteer work, is a privilege. So it's reserved for those young people that have very stable households that probably live at home, have a family that supports them financially, but also that are safe at home. So if you are a young person that are experiencing homelessness, family violence, drug and alcohol, the likelihood that you will be participating in an internship or another volunteer experience is fairly small because you worry most of the time, when you are out of the house, what could happen at home.

Buffy: There are definitely basics society needs to get right first so internships can be advantageous for everyone. But these deprivations Anna mentions mean there are many people who will never get the chance to Start Somewhere. Even if some of these people could be the leaders of the future, as Robert Shindell of Intern Bridge found through his research - and he shared in episode 1 - companies are missing out by not paying interns.

Ben: So does there need to be legislative intervention, or a self policing-scheme for calling out good internships and shaming bad ones?

Buffy: Like what Dodgy Internships is doing.

Ben: If after all it's bad for the competitiveness of the economy in the long term, do we need the government to step in?

Buffy: Probably, but as neither you nor I can vote here, someone else is going to have to lead that fight. Probably Jack Kenchington-Evans from Internships Australia.

Jack: We've recognised a few issues in the graduate labour market for mostly white collar professionals. That's the preponderance of low-quality, and unpaid, exploitative internships. We really wanted to call out the bad culture that exists out there. It's endemic, and it's at crisis point.

Buffy: Can we define what Interns Australia feels is 'bad culture?'

Jack: This is what our national fair internship pledge seeks to address. There's a few elements of what makes bad, and you know, on the flip side, what makes a good internship. First and foremost is compliance with the law, and there is rampant, brazen, systematic, non-compliance with Australia's industrial laws when it comes to internships. That's something that is bad about bad internships, and you know, there's a bunch of flow on effects obviously. There's pay roll tax evasion, there's loss of superannuation, there's a lack of data collected because it's operating in a black market, and then you throw in the Visa and immigration issues, and suddenly you've got a black market labour market on your hands. That's probably the most obvious. But there's other issues a little more subtle, a little less to do with the regulatory space, and more to do with what a good job looks like: rewarding for someone, and giving them professional skills. One thing that we're focused on in the national fair internship pledge, and in our advocacy more broadly, is promoting high-quality internships. That's where you've got onboarding, you've got a human resources infrastructure that makes sure that you're learning, you've got mentorship, you've got measurable outcomes of the internship, so you're not plonked down on the end of a desk making coffees.

There's that quality assurance that good internships will have, and that's what the national fair internship pledge seeks to address. We're breaking ground with that. There isn't an accreditation scheme in Australia, apart from our certification scheme for good internships. We're starting to roll that out a little more broadly now.

Buffy: And are you getting a flood of requests?

Jack: We're rolling it out across Melbourne and Sydney at the moment. Our latest signup was the City of Sydney, but we've had buy in from the private sector, and some peak bodies: the Australian Institute of Management, Victorian Trades Hall Council. So, yeah, we're looking to roll it out more broadly across the ASX peak public companies at the moment because they tend to have the highest quality internships.

Buffy: Look for that certification, or the absence of it, spread the word, mention it to good employers you work with, and in the meantime, tread carefully, and stand up for yourself if you need to. Rebecca Ashton of Tandem partners HR has some helpful thoughts.

Rebecca: Again I think that comes down to as well, being aware of your employment law and exactly what your entitlements are and then not being able to speak up if you're unsure about something or having someone in the organisation where you can go, "Look I'm just unsure about this, can I check it with you?" I think the biggest thing there is that there's nothing wrong with being able to speak up because at the end of the day silence is a form of consent. If you don't actually put your hand up and say, "I don't agree to this or I'm not comfortable doing this task that you've asked me to do," then how can the behaviour change? And it will just continue in a cycle, I think.

Buffy: What do you do if you are in an exploitative situation? Short of legal action, which we'll get to in a minute. Here's more great advice from Neil Wilson, a Counsellor and psychologist with the University of Melbourne Counselling and Psychological services.

Neil Wilson: We can all be guilty of it. I think we've gotta understand our own internal limits. Another little tidbit for when that ranting and that vitriol that I was talking about before, that is often a sign, not just of burn out, but also, you're doing someone else's job and part of you is very frustrated by that. But part of you can't scream at that person because they might kindly ask you to leave and I think the interns experience the emotion of helplessness quite a lot. It's hard.

I think if we asked them to feel that way it's not just a sign of burn out which what I was talking about, but it's a sign that I'm being taken advantage of here. What's my actual role within your organisation? Because if it is to get

taken advantage of, then I signed off on that, I'm sorry. My bad. I've gotta handle that myself or I've just gotta accept that, but, if it's not, it's not.

Buffy: And if you get that feeling of helplessness, what can we do about it?

Neil: I think it comes back to that 'stop to speed up' metaphor that I was using before.

Ben: We looked at that in Episode 6. We've been using it, and it's been a life saver.

Neil: Taking time off or mental health day, or say your mum's sick and you need the day off will you just any excuse to get away from the environment and have an objective viewpoint from someone else or just attempting to be as objective as you can. Why am I feeling helpless right now? Is it because I'm having trouble with my boyfriend? Is it because mum's been more critical this week? Is it because I've got to pay car rego?

The opposite of helplessness is empowerment. This is a bit nebulous, but just bear with me. What am I actually in control of at work? What am I actually in control of? And then we narrow that field of vision to try and build from there. I'm in control of the colour of the pens that I write in, not much but I'll take it for now. How do I extend that further? How can I discuss with my supervisor what other things I can be in control of?

So, helplessness, the treatment for that is often control, and if we can't control as much in that environment, and that environment isn't going to change for us, we've got to increase our control for the other hours that we're not in that environment. So, life should really be sort of eight, eight and eight - in terms it's usually ten, six and zero. So maximising the control that we have in other elements of our life. Get a bit of an extension of that fighting smart rather than fighting hard.

Ben: Phew...more dodgy ads now. Then: the law!

Dodgy: "Graduates, work unpaid two days a week as a digital marketing intern for a guilt-free brand, Adorn Cosmetics. Job requirements include working autonomously within a team environment on the creation and launch of EDMs".

Ben: Yeah, that whole virtual internship, that sounds like a-

Dodgy: Drives me crazy. But then, you could also argue, that a remote internship is providing opportunities to people in regional areas, where there aren't many internships. So, then I start thinking about that. Look, if a remote internship is

going to be a legitimate thing, it needs to be so closely supervised. As in, you're talking with your employer, mentor, whatever, every few hours, I would think. And you know, having Skype meetings and all that kind of stuff. So, I think maybe it could be done. I'm yet to hear of anyone who's told me they did a really great remote internship.

Buffy: Thanks Dodgy! So what if you are upset with your internship, and nothing happens, or you decide you want to take a stand?

Ben: Ultimately the law is on your side, even as Jack Kenchington-Evans said:

Jack: "There is rampant, brazen, systematic, non-compliance with Australia's industrial laws when it comes to internships."

Ben: So what does it look like to take it to the next level, legally?

Buffy: You might have seen her story in the Guardian: London-based freelance journalist and Aussie, Amalia Illgner, has taken Monocle, her internship provider, to court. She tells us her story.

Amalia Illgner: Well actually I'm from Sydney, and I originally studied like a BA in Communications about god, about 10 years ago and I came to England and thought I'd live and work for six months, come back. But I stayed for ten years and I worked as an Advertising Copywriter in a bunch of massive agencies, but changed my careers in 2015 and did a Masters in Journalism at Goldsmiths University. Which is pretty well regarded, and it was excellent. Since graduating in 2016 I've worked in a bunch of newspapers and magazines in London.

Yeah, so I sent a CV and a covering letter. They didn't ask me to do anything beyond that. Then I heard back two months later from the Managing Editor to come in for an interview and it was a pretty lengthy interview actually, it was probably about an hour and I had to give examples of my work and, not written story ideas but verbal ideas. They took me through this process of what the internship would entail, and that was this roster of a mix of shifts. So there'd be a morning shift from 5.30am till 2.00, a day shift from 9.00 until 6.00, and then an evening shift that went from 2.30 to 11.00 and was I up for sort of working like these odd hours? And then they sort of told me all about the duties that I would do; a lot of proofreading, a lot of fact checking but I'd also be invited to the morning conferences and be able to contribute and sort of act as a support to the Producers and Researchers.

And so that all sounded fine, but then he sort of said well we pay like expenses only, a little bit above expenses and I wasn't 100% sure what that meant.

Buffy: So was there any point that you thought, I'm worth more than 30 pounds a day?

Amalia: Yeah of course like instantly but I really kind of... the thing is, is that having gone and done a Masters in Journalism, like I'd gone and studied with a bunch of other students. The common theme for all of us since graduating is doing internships, like everyone's done at least two or three.

A lot of people in my course would have loved to have done the Monocle Internship, like one guy in particular was like "oh my god, that sounds awesome but you know, I'm working at the London Eye for just above minimum wage. There's just no way I could do that" and you know he's a really talented guy, like he can edit his own video, he speaks fluent French, Monocle's very global. He would have really benefited from it but he couldn't do it. So I was sort of thinking "hang on, literally I can only do this because I've got a partner that has a good income".

The first week or two I kind of really started to question the legitimacy of that choice. Because once I started it was really clear that it wasn't an internship as anyone would understand it, it was essentially a job. I had a vital role of booking guests and bringing them into the studio on time, and calling live correspondents on air. There was no other person who was doing that, it wasn't like I was being trained next to somebody.

The best way of standing out in Monocle, was really to pitch story ideas, to approach an editor and say, "I've got this really great idea that I think belongs in the newspaper or magazine, and I think you should run it." And so the Culture editor asked for pictures for their summer newspaper. They wanted a really big, splashy image lead story that could go on the front page of the culture section. And they hadn't filled it yet. So the race was on to find the right story that would really impress them, and make them understand that you had tonnes of ideas.

So, I spent about two evenings after my shift researching, and found that there was a museum in Ramallah in Palestine called the Palestinian Museum. It had actually been opened for I think just over two years, but it hadn't had any exhibitions yet just due to internal bureaucracy. But, they were unveiling their first ever exhibition about the city of Jerusalem which coincided with the print deadlines and everything. It's a beautiful structure. The architect

is really sympathetic to the landscape. And I managed to get an interview with the director of the museum, Mohammad Hawari.

So, that was sort of texting and WhatsApp-ing people in Palestine just to make sure they were happy to talk to me. I brought this story to the Culture editor Robert Bound, and he was like, "Fabulous. That's a really great story. We're going to run it as a Q&A, can you get me like 1,500 words by this date?" And I was like, "Yep, sure." That was all cool. Except I was still working my normal hours like doing a lot of research and assisting the producers and stuff like that. I did all of that work really outside of my designated intern hours, which was fine. Except, after I filed the story, due to the print run, the sub-editors and the fact checkers worked over the weekend to get the newspaper ready for layout and print deadlines for the Monday.

So I got an email on a Saturday afternoon. I was sitting outside like in my little courtyard having glasses of wine with some of my friends. I get this email on my phone just saying, "Hi Amalia, I'm working on your piece. I'm a fact checker. I just got a couple of questions." They said all that like any fact checker or any sub-editor does. They always have questions. "I know it's the weekend, but it would be really great if you get these answers to me ASAP." The subject line was actually "Urgent." I was just kind of like, "Really?" I've done a 60 hour week at this point, and I was just having like my Saturday. And of course, you need to answer questions. You can't just ignore an email. That's really unprofessional.

But, I just thought like, "Hang on a second. This just doesn't make any sense." I've basically worked so much on this, surely, someone could have gathered all the questions. Or at least said, "We'll pay you for any time that you go over your internship time." But, it was made explicit in my job interview that any writing or any story ideas that we would pitch or that we get published wouldn't be paid, because we were interns. It just sort of dawned on me that this internship was completely one-sided. They were getting a lot of hours and a lot of work out of me, and I was getting very, very little in return. And I just really fell out of love with the whole setup. The bargain I just felt was really stacked against me. That's basically the moment, walking upstairs on a beautiful Saturday afternoon doing extra work for no money, and where I completely fell out of love with the internship.

The numbers on unpaid interns are quite sketchy, because a lot of the internships are quite informal, and most of them - the unpaid ones - are illegal. So it's very, very hard to get good data. But, the Sutton Trust did some modelling on it, and they estimated that there's about 20,000 unpaid interns at any given time. That's a lot of people working in the British economy for no money. And people not paying income tax. It kind of just made me

contextualise my experience and I was like, "Well it's not just me being a grumpy intern. It's endemic in a lot of industries." So, I started to dig a little bit deeper. After speaking to a woman called Tanya de Grunwald, who runs a website called Graduate Fog, and she's been campaigning against exploitative internships for about eight years, she said "it's the media, it's creative industries that design, advertising, PR, and it's politics that are really entrenched". It's actually getting worse.

So when I was interviewing Tanya de Grunwald from Graduate Fog, she basically said the biggest problem is interns not coming forward, they're too scared. They think that it will put a dynamite under their career and they won't work again. And that's what I found in that research paper I mentioned earlier 'All work and no pay', is those researchers found that people who complained to their employer then and there about no pay, quickly found themselves iced out. So she said to me, "Look, I think the best thing you can do to raise awareness is to put a claim in." And that sent a little bit of a shiver down my spine 'cause I just hadn't considered that, I wanted to maybe write about it and say this is a problem and this is my experience, but I certainly hadn't considered legal action. So she put me in touch with Jolyon Maugham who's a very prominent Queen's Counsel here in London who represented Gina Miller taking the government to court over the legitimacy of Brexit and so he has a pro bono side business called The Good Law Project which essentially uses the British law for what he sees as greater goods, so he works completely pro bono on cases that he feels could make a difference to endemic problems.

And so he basically said, " Look, if you are up for bringing a case, I'm up for manning you with the solicitors and the barristers and all the resources you need to put the best case possible forward." And so I felt it'd be wrong not to actually take up that offer. I was quite surprised actually, it didn't take me very long to think, "Why not, I think I need to do this." 'Cause I think there's one thing just to complain about a system and to complain that things could be better and just to complain. That's what a lot of interns privately do. They just think it's completely unfair but it takes a lot of, not really courage but it just takes a lot of resources to have the confidence to pursue a case and I was in a really fortunate position in that I have roof over my head and I can eat every day.

Buffy: So what is the status of your case at the moment?

Amalia: We actually just got a court date last week. So, it's set for the end of April, I mean end of August, I'm sorry.

Buffy: I was gonna say, breaking news!

- Amalia: Our court date is set for the end of August. So, the steps that it involves is basically me launching a grievance with a thing called ACASS which is kind of like in a divorce where you hopefully mediate with the other party, so I did that and then if you can't come to an agreement - and Monocle didn't respond. If you can't come to agreement, then you launch an actual full on case with the employment tribunal and it's up to the employment tribunal to vet that case and say, "Yes you have a case, and we will send it to the respondent to reply." That's what's happened, and then now Monocle has 28 days to reply formally.
- Buffy: What's your ultimate goal to filing suit? Are you hoping to recoup wages, raise awareness?
- Amalia: What I do want is for the law to rule that this was illegal and I want that to be crystal clear, and I want them to stop. They've already taken down their London Editorial Internship ads. So they took that down when I gave them right of reply for my article. It just vanished. So, I want them to basically be found to be in violation of minimum wage law and I would like to write a follow up piece publicly that says that, as a deterrent to other businesses who are doing the same thing.
- Ben: If the kind of underpaid labour we've been seeing in this episode is endemic in Australia and the UK, and America who led the charge, what kind of effect is it going to have on our wider society?
- Buffy: Dan Woodman, Associate Professor of sociology at the University of Melbourne has been researching this topic and ties the meritocracy based approach to employment opportunities to social mobility. Meaning: If anyone can get an internship, anyone can rise to the top...but:
- Dan Woodman: The general story in sociology is that people overestimate social mobility. There's an irony in the countries that talk about social mobility the most. You know the American dream is you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps, but countries like the US and even the UK and the other Anglo, English-speaking countries, it's actually not as much social mobility as you would think. But Australia does a little bit better than maybe some of our English-speaking friends. So there is some social mobility and we see that in our study, but there's also a sense of anxiety amongst people who are maybe struggling to just stay where they are and feel like they're treading water, or may not be able to live even the quality of life, particularly around things like security that their parents may have had. So social mobility doesn't all go in one direction either.

Buffy: So unpaid internships might be affecting the social mobility of our society and the competitiveness of our businesses as Interns Australia mentioned earlier.

Ben: But with more and more people doing unpaid internships, even if they are aware that their ability to do an unpaid internship through privileges they have not earned, excludes others, potentially more worthy candidates, is anything going to change?

Buffy: So is the unpaid internship here to stay? Hamish Taylor has the final word.

Hamish Taylor: In that sense it's really unfair. I think big organisations who hand out unpaid internships are missing a whole chunk of really talented intelligent and super, super, organised individuals and ultimately that's to the detriment of their organisation and their ability to regenerate and bring in new talent.

Buffy: In the next episode of Starting Somewhere, we look at what else you could do instead of an internship: Peace Corps, industry projects, or even volunteering. What skills do you get, and how can you sell them to a future employer? Because there are other ways to start somewhere.